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CHRISTOWELL

A Dartmoor Tale.

R. D. BLACKMORE,

AUTHOR OF "MARY ANERLEY," ETC.

"Splendidè mendax."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CHRISTOWELL.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL PUNK.

YOUNG Squire Touchwood had borne, as well as could reasonably be expected, the blight, or even worse than that, the blasting of his ardent hopes. When Mr. Arthur, in the kindest manner, set before him the state of the case, and denied him all hope of his daughter, Dicky replied, with some dignity, that he was old enough to understand his own business, and could not allow even Captain Arthur to lay down the law for him, about his own good. With orders to clear out, he must do so, although he must say that it was very hard upon him; particularly when he would be having to bunk, in about six weeks, to Cambridge. For he must keep next October

term, and glad he would be to do it; for he found the people of this neighbourhood inclined to sit upon him; and he had left three dogs, at a shilling a week for grub, in the mews near Sidney Sussex. Upon the whole, he thought, that dogs were better, to be kind to a fellow, than human people. However, he would stick up to Miss Arthur still; because he had never seen anybody like her, until he was kicked off the premises.

Captain Larks could not help smiling, at the natural mixture of his ideas, and the downfall of his sportive face, and the classical cast of woe, by Lady Touchwood compared to the 'muteness of a Niloby.'

"Don't be too hard, sir," he said; "I shall have to bunk, in next to no-time; and if I could go away without being sacked, it would keep me to the scratch, and set me fine. I know, that Miss Arthur is a million cuts above me. But still, I might think; and it keeps me thinking. Old Jakes, or at least I mean our Senior Tutor, says that nothing has ever been proved against me, except some want of thought, and a leaning towards trivial amusements. But this is so long winded, and so bursting, that I am sure he would approve of it."

"You put these matters in a light quite new to me, but perhaps a very excellent one," said Mr. Arthur; "of our great universities I know nothing. If it will help you, in your *curriculum*, as I believe you term it, to call upon me, when you come home for the holidays——"

"But we never come home for the holidays, sir. We go down for vacation."

"Well, when you are vacant, or whatever it may be, we shall be very glad to see you again. Your mind is a very candid one; and open to good impressions."

"I tell you, sir, whatever you may think, that nothing can ever compare with the one impression, I am suffering from. But as facts are against me, I must go. No gentleman could do otherwise. Only I would like to have two things settled. First, that a dreadfully stuck-up young fellow, of the name of Westcombe, shall not be allowed to take advantage of my absence, and jockey me (as we say at Cambridge), by dodges, such as we cannot stoop to; and again that I may be allowed to come, and say 'good-bye,' before I go back to Trinity."

"Certainly, if I am at home, we shall be very glad to say 'good-bye;' though there must be nearly two months yet to run. But as to Mr.

Westcombe," said the captain smiling, "I cannot undertake to warn him off the premises, any more than has been done already. He is a good young man; and you should do him justice, like another man."

"Well, he may be good enough;" Squire Dicky confessed, in his fine candid manner; "but for all that, I call him exceedingly nasty. I like a man to be honest, and upright, and come to the front-door, as I always do; instead of going fishing round the corner. Now, sir, please to make a mem. of what I say. I have seen a good deal of the world, in my time; and I never knew any good come, of those fellows, who stick up to be everything wonderful. If anything happens to your house, worse than our reverend friend had to put up with, you will find, that the blame lies upon that young Westcombe. He rushes all over the moor, like a moorman; and he must fall into bad company. And you know, as well as I do, what comes of that."

"But, Mr. Touchwood," Captain Larks could not help saying; "surely it is not Mr. Westcombe; but somebody else, who in a youthful manner, seeks the society of sporting men. You called him a 'stuck-up young fellow,' just

now; though he must be four or five years, your senior. And if that means anything, it seems to mean, that he would hold himself above——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, for interrupting you, it seems to mean that, to a certain extent. But I have had more experience, than you might suppose, to look at me. And I know what men of that character always prove to be, at Cambridge. Till you come to know them, you would fancy that butter would not melt——"

"If I may interrupt you, in my turn, I would say, that such things might be spoken more fairly, in the presence of the person they concern. Or at least, that some instance should be given."

"That is the very thing; they take good care, that there never shall be any instance to give. I have nothing particular, to say against him. I give you my general conclusions, founded upon his behaviour to me; which has not been that of a gentleman. I thought that he was after my sister Julia; which would have been a very proper thing. And poor Judy thought so too, as I may tell you; of course, in the strictest confidence. I offered him a shake-down at our place, and the run of my best Imperials. But he preferred to have a crib, at Parson Short's."

"We had better quit the subject. He behaved quite rightly, in declining your hospitality, under the circumstances. When you are older, you will look at things more fairly. Take the word of a man, who has seen something of the world; which you fondly imagine you have done. Hold your own course resolutely, when it is a worthy one; say nothing, against those who cross it, unless you say it in their presence; and make more allowance for their view of the question, than you expect them to make for yours."

"I have a great deal to thank you for," replied Dicky, who was not ungrateful; "but I'm blest, if I can make much allowance for that fellow. You bear in mind my warning about him. I always stick fast to what I have said. Right, or wrong, I stick to it; though many people call me changeable. Good-bye, sir; you may trust me to come again, before I go up."

It was all the more unfair, on the part of Squire Dicky, to go on in that style about Jack Westcombe, because he knew not a syllable as yet, of what Jack had been saying in the gateway. The knowledge of that might have hurt his feelings, beyond all reserve of judgment; as a man who tumbles into a liquid manure-tub, when delivering a lecture on astronomy, must be

pardoned for loss of philosophy. But the young squire, humble though he was in many ways, could not help thinking, from his knowledge of the fair sex, that he ought to get on with them, at least as well as Westcombe did. Jack had not half as much to say, as Dicky, neither did he understand the style of dresses, or the turn of thought shaped to some half-a-dozen types, which the young lady chooses, and changes, very properly. Dicky's knowledge of these subjects made him always most agreeable, if he only got a fair chance of displaying it; while it enabled him to be, when baited, nicely disagreeable to all of them.

On the other hand, Mr. John Westcombe now was full of magnanimous ideas. He felt an extremely contemptuous charity—which could not in such a case be rendered into "love,"—towards the versatile, and lighthearted Dicky. No provocation would have made him punch the head of his rival, in the present fine state of things. He bore with him well; as the man who has got into the right box, sympathises with the outsider—a sitting down sympathy, which abides in its breaches. Not that John Westcombe was at all cock-sure of winning his beloved Rose, for a long time to come; only that it became a joy to him

to find, that the other fellow's innings were cut short. And reason as we may upon such a state of things, they turn out to be both above, and below, reason.

"I am going to tell you something, father," said the youth to the colonel, at a genial time, when a quiet, and solid repast had been dealt with; or in plainer English, after a good dinner; "we shall have visitors to-morrow; and I dare say, as long as there is anything to shoot, General Punk will stick here."

"My dear boy, your tone is inhospitable;" the father replied, with mild reproof. "My old friend is coming, to enjoy himself, and also to afford us pleasure. He has been a highly distinguished soldier, and must not be made light of, because no longer wanted. Under Providence, he has contributed greatly to the discomfiture of our foes. He deserves our best welcome; and he shall have it."

"You may trust me, sir, to be at his service wholly; even if he shoots me, as he partly did, last time. All I mean is, that I shall have little chance of a quiet talk with you, when he begins bombarding."

"He discharges his battery, before he has unlimbered;" Colonel Westcombe answered,

with some grave thought; "but it is delightful to see how he smiles, when he seems to have brought down something. His eyes are not capable of fine discrimination, after all the powder smoke they have been through. I shall observe him very carefully, my boy; and if I find him worse, than he was last time, we can simply load him with blank-cartridge. You are a good shot. Fire, when he does; and bring him whatever you knock over."

"It is the only safe plan, I believe;" Jack Westcombe replied, as he rubbed his left leg, where he still had a pellet of the general's bombardment. "And if we put in five drachms of powder, he would never find it out, through want of kick. However, let him have some shot, the first day, and see how he goes on with it. There is one great comfort, that as he cannot walk, he nearly always fires over other people's heads. But the great danger is, when a hare gets up. Keep behind him, father, I entreat you. Let him shoot *Nous*, or Mr. Short, or me; if he must hit something."

"He seems to have a gift of hitting something; though not at all the thing he aimed at. But we will hope for the best, my boy. What was it, you were going to say to me?"

"Well, sir, I was thinking that you ought to know, that I had the good luck to meet Miss Arthur, two or three evenings ago, as I came up from fishing in the valley; and I said to her——"

"You promised to have nothing to say to that young lady; until I had some explanation with her father."

"I know I did. But upon the understanding, that you should have it speedily. Well, that must have been nearly six weeks ago, sir."

"Well, suppose it is. I don't call that much," said the colonel, with his broad grey eyebrows moving. "I tell you that is no time; and you have behaved badly."

"I call it a very long time;" answered Jack, looking at his father, with the very same glance, which the latter would have given five and thirty years ago; "and begging your pardon, I have not behaved badly. But I should have behaved very badly indeed, and in my own opinion, sneakingly—if I had passed her like a stranger; simply because you hang fire so long."

"You express yourself in a most disrespectful manner; and until you beg my pardon, for using such language, I shall not regard you as a gentleman."

The colonel, in this most tremendous, and at

the same time almost tremulous, state—for he never had such a quarrel with his son before—doubled up his napkin, and cracked an early filbert (of the thin-shelled Cosford kind) with the napkin, instead of the crackers; and crunched up the nut without a bit of salt, to prove the tranquillity of his mind. And instead of looking any more at his son, he directed his gaze at the decanter-stoppers first, and then higher, and higher, until he took in all the ceiling.

"Sir," sad Jack Westcombe, though his feelings too were hurt; "I confess that I spoke disrespectfully, and deserve to be well thrashed for it. I beg your pardon with all my heart; and will promise to do nothing of the kind again."

Then the gaze of the father came back from the ceiling, and fell upon the bright eyes of his son; and if the two had been of any race but ours, there must have been a little scene between them.

But equally possessing that most precious birthright, self-control, and disdain of outbursts, they were satisfied to know, from each other's look, and manner, that the temper between them was put quietly away.

"Very well; now you may go on," said Colonel Westcombe; "and I will try to make every allowance for you, Jack."

"Well, sir, I went up to Miss Arthur; as any one, but a sneak, must have done. And I told her exactly, what my views were."

"That you meant to marry her, I suppose, without anybody's leave, except her own, and the parson's?"

"How could I put it in so coarse a way?" the young man asked, with an undercut at his admirable father; "no, sir, what I said was very mild indeed; and I am sorry to say, that there was nothing settled."

"Do you mean to say, Jack, that you were so afraid of me, that you durst not speak out, in a straightforward manner?"

"No, it was not quite that, so much. Though, of course, you are very hard upon me. But I felt, that I could not press a young lady, very young still, and without any mother, to engage herself to me, even if she liked me; against her father's wishes, and my own father's too."

"Then, after all, nothing came of your proceedings."

There was some contempt in Colonel Westcombe's voice, as well as a little touch of disappointment, for he had taken a very great liking to Rose, and pitied her peculiar position. "You young fellows never know your own minds now."

"What are we to do, with all the other minds against us?" the young fellow asked, as if his will were only wax; "in such a state of things, what would you have done, sir?"

"Well, sir," said the colonel; "I would have done just this. I would have taken the young lady in my arms, very tenderly, but without any warmth, to alarm her; and I would have said, 'my dear, they are all against us; but if you stick to me, I will stick to you; and the Lord will carry us through with it;' and possibly then, I might have kissed her."

"Sir," answered Jack, with a smile, and a blush—for his mind was very delicate—"you have taught me the proper thing to do, next time. I am very much obliged to you; and if I ever have such luck, I shall add, 'I am acting on my dear father's orders.'"

"You will add nothing of the kind," said the colonel, trying not to smile at this bad turn of the case; "I authorize no such extreme proceeding. I have not to consider my own wishes only, nor even yours; which are yet dearer to me. I have to consider, what is right, and upright. And the matter is full of grave difficulties. And the worst of it is, that I cannot tell you, what they are. However, I

think we can do no great harm, by drinking the health of that sweet girl. Fill your glass, my boy; and here is my love to Miss Rosie. I will candidly own, that I like her dearly. I would not desire a better wife for you; if things can only be brought round."

"I don't care, whether things are round, or square," cried Jack, after standing up (as decency used to require, when a lady's health was given); "but if you are with me, sir, (as you now have pledged yourself,) the only trouble for me is, to make her love me."

Having a very vast opinion of his son, Colonel Westcombe would not say a word of any sort, upon that particular question; upon which Jack was hoping for a good word, to encourage him. His father guessed as much; and looked mysteriously at him, with a shake of his head, and a tightening of his lips, and a well-meant effort at a formidable frown. Then in fear of having gone too far, he said—"Let us go and see, where John Sage is."

There was nothing, on the turnpike roads of England, to be compared now with the *Quicksilver* mail; which ran, at the full speed of horse, whip, and man, right away from Exeter to London; and back again, in the duplicate; cross-

ing one another, with scarcely time, for Jehus to lift elbow. Although the rail was open now considerably westward, the *Quicksilver* held her own—from her haste she was a female—and swallowed up the plains, and the hills as well, at the rate of fourteen miles an hour, from the General Post-office, to the *London Inn*, at Exeter. Then with a modified, but still rapid speed—far greater than that of our suburban trains—she went on to Plymouth, and even to Falmouth; with some loss of vehemence, among the quiet Cornishmen.

General Punk was not the man, to travel inside the best coach that ever breathed, or panted—by means of its horses; moreover he liked to save his money, whenever he could do so, without self-expense. He rode upon the roof; and let nobody know what his importance was; because he must have had to give half-a-crown, where a shilling answered nobly. Two coachmen retired to the bosoms of their families, one at Salisbury, and one at Exeter, without guessing, what a hero, (both of fame, and cash,) had been sitting behind them, and watching them keenly, and giving them a shilling, to be thankful for. If they had known, they would have looked, each one, at his shilling arithmetically;

as the time-hallowed manner of the cabman is; who seems to say, "there are twelve pence in it; and I scorn you, for every one of them."

But when the *Quicksilver* began to lose some of its too mercurial properties, westward of the faithful city; and a coachman sat upon the box, who had almost time enough to speak, without pulling out his watch; General Punk came forward well, with some very shrewd remarks about the weather; every one of which would have cost him twopence, if offered in the earlier stages. They would stand him in that amount, even now; but he knew that he must come out handsomely, when he should stop at Colonel Westcombe's gate; and having brought up his courage to a full crown-piece (for the coachman, and guard, to apportion), he might as well have his talk, out of it.

"Five minutes after time already;" he said, pulling out a vast gold watch, as they trotted between the two Tawtons; "but I suppose you don't care about time, down here."

"No, sir, not very much," the coachman answered; "we gets a lot of gentlemen, with heaps of luggage, that we ought to have left behind, of rights. Where be you going to get down, sir?"

"At Colonel Westcombe's,—Westcombe Hall, a little way beyond Okehampton. My luggage need not cost you more than thirty seconds, if you have arranged it properly."

"Colonel Westcombe is a very nice gentleman, sir. Likewise a liberal one, in all his ways. We shall not grudge a minute or two, at his gate."

"My things must be handled with care," said the general; "and it takes me a little time, to get down. These coaches are made so confoundedly narrow. I have got the cramp, in both my legs, and a Frenchman's bullet in one of them. I must not be hurried, if it takes ten minutes."

"Right, sir; you shall not be hurried," the coachman answered cheerfully. "The likes of us must make allowance, for the gentlemen as have fought for us."

"This fellow will expect at least half-a-guinea," thought the general, regretting his patriotism, and relapsing into silence, to save gold. For here was one of those rich men, who look after their money sharply; having enough to make it worth their while. Neither do they value it, one halfpenny the less, for the very weak reason, that they soon must say "good-

bye;" but rather, (with the loyalty of friends, who soon must part,) cling heartily, and faithfully, to every token of it.

This was not the only thing, that made him so respectable. For General Punk had a hundred virtues, even more noble than parsimony. He was brave, determined, straightforward, contemptuous, candid, loquacious, tender-hearted, fiery, and conservative. And people, who began with making sad mouths at him (from the salt of his crust), very often went on (when they were compelled to do so), deeper into him, with a nicely growing relish. For he had in him that making of a liking among men, which all of us are glad to feel for, and to meet half way.

CHAPTER II.

WORLDLY WISDOM.

THE sagacious Jack had brought down a pair of steps, for he knew that General Punk was shaky, in his lower members. That distinguished officer had never been at Westcombe Hall, before, and was now determined to have a good time of it. When last he came to shoot something, or somebody, in the company of his ancient friend, Colonel Westcombe was a poor man, living in a little house near Frome; and only able to procure, from wealthier neighbours, a day or two of sport, just to keep his hand in. But the general had enjoyed his visit rarely, and abstained from shooting anything, except a little piece of Jack. Now when, with the help of that young man, he was safely landed at the colonel's gate, and rendered into the owner's arms, the general counted all his boxes, blew up his man, because one of them was uncorded,

and then shook hands with everybody, including John Sage, who had a red waistcoat on. "Magnificent," he said, "magnificent! I had no idea there were such hills in England."

In honour of this special guest, Mrs. Westcombe came down that day to dinner, which she very seldom did; not from any small reserve; but because she could not take food like the rest, and feared to make her visitors uncomfortable. And the colonel was in the very best of spirits, and prepared to fight his way through anything.

"We hoped to have had a very lively young lady, and a very handsome one as well," he said, "who would put even General Punk upon his mettle—my fair godchild, Julia Touchwood. But she cannot come, until to-morrow. Prepare yourself to capitulate; for the first time in your life, my friend."

"Mrs. Westcombe, I have brought my two stars with me, as big as those on the panels of the *Quicksilver*; would you recommend me to wear them? Or will they only be my death, like my old friend Nelson's?"

Mrs. Westcombe laughed, and they got on well together; for the general had always a

good word among the ladies. He looked down upon them, and yet up to them; which makes them feel pleased with themselves, and their admirers.

"Jack, you be off now. We want to talk about you;" Colonel Westcombe said, when the dessert was done with, and the upshot of sunset, on the brown oak beams, was quivering like water-weeds. "Take Plover, and Bell, for a run; or go, and catch us half-a-dozen trout for breakfast."

"A very extraordinary young man," the general observed to the colonel; as Jack with a bow, but without a word, withdrew. "I never could bear the idea of having a son; because they are so envious. But if I could have had a boy, of such discipline as yours, I do believe, I could have got on with him."

"You must not suppose that I have grown Master Jack, as I grow a cabbage, or a cucumber. He is the result of a quantity of care, and discipline, and good example. But in spite of all that," said the colonel, coming nearer, "he falls out of the ranks sometimes. He is a very steady-going young fellow; but he has a confoundedly strong will of his own."

"No soldier is much good, without that, when it comes to close quarters, and the bayonet."

"That is true enough, as we have often proved. But this must be taken in a different light. It is a most extraordinary thing altogether; and I cannot tell what to make of it. You remember young Pole, of the 'Never mind Whats,' as we used to call them; and the mysterious scrape he got into?"

"I should rather think I did," replied General Punk, shaking off the drowsiness of his long journey; "Westcombe, that was one of the things, which I never could make head or tail of, and never hope to do so."

"You would have said, that he was the very last man in the whole British army, to act as he did?"

"Sir," said the general, with a strong expression; "I would as soon have believed it of myself, or you."

"So would I. So would I," exclaimed Colonel Westcombe; "I had reason to love, and admire that young fellow, as I have often told you, for the very rarest pluck, and self-possession. But what can you say, in the teeth of a man's own statement, and confession?"

"I have thought that he was bribed to confess himself a coward. A fellow may speak falsely, for reasons of his own, but cannot act falsely to his whole nature."

"I know that you have sometimes looked at it in that way; and sometimes I myself have done so. But the man lives under a ban, for his life; whether he has earned it by his deeds, or by his words. And you would not like your only son to marry that man's daughter."

"Certainly not, while the father lived uncleared. But he is dead long ago. And his daughter may be pardoned."

"You are a generous man, as well as a man of the world;" Colonel Westcombe answered, with a sad look at his friend. "But Pole is not dead. He is living here on Dartmoor; and my son Jack is in love with his daughter. And worse than that, he has engaged himself so far, that he cannot honourably draw back."

"What a kettle of fish, to be sure! It serves you quite right for educating him. We never wanted any education. I can spell 'Officer,' but I can't spell 'Military.' And I don't believe the sharpest fellow on the Staff could do it; or

at any rate not without three tries. What did you send him to Oxford for?"

"Because he was such a dab at Latin; and there wasn't any fighting to be got. However, it is too late, to talk about that. The question is, what am I to do? And before you can say a word upon that point, you must listen to all that I have got to tell you."

"A young fellow is generally at his worst, from two to four and twenty;" General Punk, with good reason, declared, having suffered lately from one of them. "He looks back with contempt upon boys, who are a thousand times more amusing than himself; and he is stupid enough to hold his tongue, when he might make pleasant blunders."

"Jack is a sensible fellow," said the colonel; "although he may not be amusing. But he says very clever things sometimes, according to my weak judgment. But he has not done a clever thing in this, I must confess; according to the views of the world, at least. But, my dear friend, we must not be too worldly; and when you hear the facts, you will be able to excuse him."

After this little preface, he fell to, and recounted (so far as he knew it) all the story

concerning his son, and Rose Arthur. The general listened, as a judge does to a junior counsel, with a patronizing smile, and comfortable nods, to show that he was attending.

"One thing you must remember," said the colonel, at the finish, not being wholly pleased to have it taken coolly; "the young lady is a girl after my own heart, innocent, ladylike, gentle, and affectionate; careful, and thrifty, an admirable cook, highly accomplished, most simple, and modest; not at all a chatterer, not at all a gadabout, not contradictory, not full of her own beauty——"

"A model of every female virtue,—except cash, and a father who can be produced."

"Well, I must expect you to look hardly at it. But as for the cash—that is no obstacle at all. Upon the whole, I prefer that she should not have it. Jack will have plenty to rub on with."

"Then you would not like her to be one of the greatest heiresses in England? I suppose that would be another obstacle, Westcombe?"

As he spoke, the general watched his friend, to test his sincerity, as the best friends do.

"That would be a very great obstacle indeed, and a fatal one altogether, because—— But

Punk, you are joking. Her father is a poor man, maintaining himself by his own work."

"I did not even know that he was living," the general answered, with the smile of one, who has the clue to an astonishment; "it was said that he had shot himself; and it seemed quite natural. But if he is living, and can prove his identity, he is now Lord Pole, by courtesy; the only surviving son of that rakish old hermit, the old Earl Delapole."

"But there is a grandson, Lord Pole's son, who stands between this man, and the succession. The son of that man, who tried to screen his poor brother. I know that he is dead; but his son is living."

"Not he!" cried the general; "he is as dead as this nut-shell. He was carried off by small-pox, some months ago. The poor old earl was mad about it, and would not even let the news get into the papers."

"Oh why, and oh woe—as old Dods used to say—what a difference a little thing makes! You remember the Marquis of C—— and three bullets that he carried on his watch-chain, for intercepting his three interceptors. But Pole lives such a lonely life, and is severed from all his friends so wholly, that I dare say he has

not heard a word of all this. And from what I am told of him, he will not want to hear it. Is it generally known, in London?"

"Probably, among all who care to know it. I heard it; but it did not concern me much; and I never thought about it, from that time to this. But what a fine chance, for Master Jack!"

"I am sorry for the poor fellow, and disappointed on my own account. But perhaps it is all for the best," said the colonel; "he may fret a little; and he must not walk so much."

"What do you mean?" asked General Punk: "your course is clear; mapped out, as we used to say, by the march of the enemy. You nab the young heiress at once, of course; and your son is a made man, gets in for the county, where the old earl's property lies, and invites me to shoot over fifty square miles. I have earned that, by bringing you this great news."

"No," said Colonel Westcombe, looking sternly, but speaking as mildly as he could to his ancient friend, and present guest; "my boy's course is the opposite to that; unless he cuts loose from his father, and from his old father's ideas of"—honour he was going to say,

but for fear of wounding his friend, said—"justice; Jack must withdraw, immediately."

"Rubbish!" quoth the general. "Quixotic rubbish! Westcombe, you are joking. Clinch the nail at once. All is fair, in love, and war. Who will ever know, that you had heard of this?"

"I shall know," replied his host, with the self-control which age had taught him. "And that is the first thing a man must consider. My dear friend, when you come to think, you will see that I could not act so."

"I am sorry, if I have given bad advice;" the general answered warmly. "That comes of considering the interests of one's friends. But really, your scruples are quite childish."

"Wise, or unwise, they are not to be got over. If you were in my place, you would have them. Now, acting according to them, what am I to do? The position is a most unpleasant one."

"From my point of view, which you reject, the position is a commanding one. But a great deal depends upon one question. Is the girl in love with Jack?"

"That is more than I can say at present. My son is so diffident, that he fears to believe

it. But I think that she likes him. How could she help it? But he has not had so very many chances."

"If the girl is in love with Jack," General Punk laid down the law, as if he were Cupid's Commander-in-chief—"allow me to put up my bad leg, in the absence of the ladies—then sooner or later, she will have him, whatever you may do, my friend; or else she is not a true-born Pole. What is she like? Has she got their chin?"

"I did not notice it particularly; and I did not know then who she was. Her eyes took my attention mainly. Let me see—yes, she has a very good chin; pointed, without being sharp, you know."

"Then she will have Jack, you may depend upon it. The girls always have their own way now. It is not as it used to be. All you have to do, is to do nothing; if you will not make a bold stroke for it."

"I must consider. I must counsel with my wife. She always hits upon the proper course. But come, I am neglecting my duty to you. You always have one glass of Burgundy, I know. There is no gout in your system.

They have knocked that pretty well out of us both. There is a good side to everything."

"I'll believe it, when I find one to my bad leg;" said the general, who was not an optimist.

CHAPTER III.

ROVING SHOTS.

MEANWHILE, "Captain Larks," as he liked to be called by his neighbours, was going on steadily. Of all the busy year, which surrounds the gardener, with a zodiac of clustering tasks, there is no busier time, than when he expects once more to see the Pleiads. The dry heats of summer are mainly gone then, and the nights of muttering thunder; and the drowsy weight of the air begins to tissue its track with gossamer. For the gentle dew, which has failed the short weak night, is spread abroad again, and a new bloom mantles on the seasoned leaves, and the morning, getting up when men can see it, glistens at its leisure down long avenues of light.

A gardener ought to be a short man fairly, so that his fruit may not knock him on the head. That he, with amazement at his own

skill—which after all, has not much to do with it—may stand with his hat on, and look up, and thank Providence for its bounty, and hope to save some of it from felonious boys. For there is no other work of all the poor exiles of Paradise, beset with so many expulsive plagues, as this of their original break-down. Man seems to know it, and to modify his hopes; or, when experience has killed them, to moderate his grumbling to the utmost. Who ever heard a gardener grumble? Farmers do so, because it is their nature; and in better days, it kept the prices up. Moreover, they find in their work less solace. How can they identify themselves, over three or four hundred sprawling acres, with every object of their care? Their common plan is to attend to the good, and let the bad go home to its author.

Mr. Arthur (who was born a gardener, and a warrior only by after-birth) often bewailed his own size, and stature, which cumbered him in the leafy walks of peace, especially at pot-work.

"Oh, Short, my good friend," he exclaimed one day, when he had knocked half the bloom off a fine bunch of grapes; "what would I give for six inches off, and to have my head where my shoulders are!"

"And what would I give for six inches on," the vicar answered pleasantly, "and to have my shoulders, where my head is!"

This proves nothing but the discontent of man—a matter which requires no proving. But the captain, on the whole, was not discontented now, if only he could have his own way. For his pears were growing ruddy from the passage of the wind—which colours fruit infinitely more than any sun—and his apples were clustering against each other's cheeks, and his grapes were swelling, like that bunchy apparatus of a cow, which society loves, but never mentions.

"I never had such a grand crop, in all my life, in spite of all the maggots, and the earwigs, and the drought;" the captain declared candidly to his pipe in confidence. "But the wasps are coming out, and the rabbits getting troublesome, and a lot of bluetits have come down from the furze. To go away now would be simple murder. And thirty new pears, from Leroy, come into bearing, that must be watched every day, at least, and the big ones fastened to their spurs with bast. All of Van Mons', or Esperen's raising, or that other old officer—what a queer thing it is, that since

the peace set in, so many French, and Belgian, officers of cavalry have been great pear-growers. The one pursuit seems to lead up to the other. But here comes Rose! What now, my pet? How pale you look! And it takes a good deal to make my little girl look pale."

"No. Sometimes I become so stupid, that it makes me ashamed, when I begin to think."

As Rose pulled her hat off, and tried to look back, through the twinkling maze of leaves, her father set off, at a very rapid pace for a person of his age, and substance. He scattered a score of pears, right and left, even from his best nursed pyramids, and he rushed to the river-course (arcaded now with filberts, which danced above the stream, for the trout to jump at) but neither there, nor anywhere could he descry a robber. He had given chase, according to his daughter's frightened glance, and in sequence of his own uneasiness.

"There is nobody," he said, as he came back, short of breath. "What made you think there was anybody?"

"Because I saw him," answered Rose, with vivid reason. "I saw him, as clearly as I see you now. A tall dark man, with a rough coat on, standing in the bushes, and staring at me."

"Show me the spot, where you fancy that he stood. You have been a little nervous, for some days, my darling. If a man has been there, we shall find some traces."

Some clearness is required, as in marking down a woodcock, to show, among a crowd of trees, precisely the position of the something that has caught the eye. But Rose, who worked lovingly among her father's trees, and knew them all as thoroughly as her own stitch-work, led the way at once to a quick turn of the Christow, where a crest of fern hung over it. "He was in this fern; for I saw a broken frond hanging down between me, and his sandy-coloured legs."

"Well done, my dear!" said Mr. Arthur, with a laugh, to restore her to a lighter mood. "His sandy-coloured trousers, I suppose you mean, or breeches, or whatever 'tis, that adorns the rat-catcher's nether man. No doubt it was a rat-catcher, or some other poacher. Dicky Touchwood pays sixpence, a head, for live rats, to keep his new pack of little terriers in training. No place is sacred where a rat lives now."

He knew, as well as Rose, that it was no rat-catcher; but he could not bear to see her frightened in her own home-quarters.

"I thought that the rat-catchers always brought their dogs," she answered, "and at least one boy, for company. I told you what Mike Smith said to me—'if you was to give me three score pun', Miss, I would not go arattin', up the river, by my sel'.' And Mike is considered, as you are aware, the bravest man in Christowell, except John Sage."

"The fault of those excessively brave men is their tendency to under-rate their own courage. But certainly, there has been some one, or other, here; probably intending ill to my poor pears. Ah, now I see; how stupid of me! That man near Exeter—whatever is his name? The one who was so terribly put out, because he had nothing fit to hold a candle to my *Léon Leclerc*, and could not find out the name of them, although it was upon them. Depend upon it, he has heard of this new batch in bearing, exemplifying all the recent gains. And I, like a fool, have left the labels still on some of them. I am thankful, that he has not put his saw through every one of them. Of all jealous mortals, I am sorry to confess, that a gardener is the most jealous, narrow, and secretive. His main point is, to keep his wretched scraps of knowledge to himself, most strictly. Whereas

a liberal-minded man should impart to everybody everything he knows."

"And leave all the labels on his trees," said Rose; which made her father smile, while he told her that she could not see the proper force of any clear reasoning.

"But what was this jealous fellow like, my dear?" he continued, as he saw that all her little scare was over. "To rob me of my money, is a charitable theft; but to rob me of my knowledge is the rapacity of a cur."

"How can I tell what he was like, dear father; when the mere sight of him so frightened me? But he did not look like a gardening man; for they generally get into a lazy kind of stare."

"Like mine, for instance; or Sam Slowbury's, who is off so disloyally harvesting, just when his hoe is wanted most. He will make a pound *extra*, and be three months out of work, when Farmer Willum has done with him. But I told you what he said to me—'The Lord made the farm; but the ladies makes the gardening;' with a contemptuous reference to you, Miss Rose."

"I am sure that he never meant me; because he told me that I had very good ideas, sounder and more solid, ten times over, than any of my

father's. He believed it thoroughly. And who was I to correct him?"

"Not at all the proper one to do it. It would have been most ungracious. But I will take a walk with you, by-and-by, my dear. We will go as far as Brent-Fuzz corner. Mrs. Slowbury has a sore throat, you say; we will take her some medlar jelly. And there may be something left there for us, by Master Pugsley. Let us work all the day, and have a walk this evening."

The captain was as free from small personal fear, as any man in England. But the bravest man is troubled by a prowling foe, when he has a precious home to guard. To think that his daughter could not walk in his own garden, without being skulked upon and scared, aroused not his anger only, but a stinging sense of insecurity. He watched her as far as the porch; and then returned to examine the track of the enemy. But of this he made nothing; for the ground was very dry; and the man who had been there was cunning enough. So the only conclusion he arrived at was, that he durst not leave home for the present, without having settled his daughter in safety elsewhere.

Neither did his visit to Brent-Fuzz corner

tend to reassure his mind. Sam Slowbury was not at home, but hard at work at a harvest supper about a mile away; and as he took lead in the choral roar, the breeze brought his voice up the valley, much improved by the softening influence of travel.

"He do sing bootiful!" Mrs. Slowbury whispered, wiping away an unbidden tear, whose source was more in the distance perhaps, than the deep inner meaning of her husband's words; which were, as you could make out, if you went to the barn-door, half a mile nigher to his lungs—

"'Tis the stroke o' the clock, to be jolly, boys;
'Tis a crack'd plate weeps for its folly, boys;
'Tis a handkercher of holly, boys,
Should tickle the prickles of the staid folk.
When a man hath been swinging his hook, boys,
He desarveth better than a book, boys,
And a' must give his leg an uncrook, boys;
By the will of the Lord, who hath made folk.
With a hip, hip, hip, hurrah, boys!"

And a clinking of all cans in chorus.

"He do sing so bootiful; it maketh me feel sad, when I look on all they little ones, if his breath was to go from him. And the man as sung second to my Sam, last year, have got the grass gone to seed over him."

"For the sake of your family, Mrs. Slowbury," said the captain, considering the baby, who was gazing through her dangling hair at him; "you must not take the melancholy side of things. Think of your husband, with good wages now, and work for the winter before him, whatever the weather may be, if he keeps straight."

"Ah, if he only kapeth straight," she answered; "Sam had never a better maister over him. But, I tell you, sir, though I cut away the bread from my children's lips, by saying it, he be not kaping straight, down to your place."

"Whatever he may be doing, Mrs. Slowbury (and I have had grounds for suspicion lately), I will not hear a word of it from you. It is honest, and very good of you, to wish to tell me. But I cannot have it so."

"Sir, you are a gentleman," the poor woman answered, wiping more tears away, with her baby's elbow; "and you can make allowance for a poor man as is tempted. My Sam is so honest as the day, by temper; but what can he do again they golden guineas?" With a deep sob, she went to a little cupboard by the fireplace, and with anguish interlaced with pride,

brought out a blue jar of coarse Bovey ware. It was half full of brown sugar, which she turned out on a plate; and at the bottom of the sugar were three broad guineas.

"Take them, sir," she said; "they be all foul-earned. I had them out of my Sam's waistcoat pocket, when he were a' talkin' in his sleep, one night. A thing as I never knowed him do in fifteen year of married life, by reason of the curse of Achan. When he come to feel for 'un, I said, 'Sam, Satan hath 'a sent 'un; and Satan hath taken 'un away.' And he turned as white, as this here plate. And a' hathn't had the face to ax no more about 'un. A score of times, I've yearned to go, and see you, sir, consarning it. But my mind was so upset, that I bided, and I bided."

"Bide no longer," said the captain cheerfully, "in an anxious state of mind. Put by those tempters for an evil day. I shall not be hard upon your husband, Mrs. Slowbury. A man who has an honest wife, and conscience so loud as to whisper in his sleep, when he sleeps as hard as Sam does, will come straight by-and-by, if he is well looked after."

"Well, sir, them's the very words, though not so grammary, as I laid to my buzzum, when

my Sam were drunk last night. But a' must come home zober to-night, for a' hath to lay down the time to their voices, with the neck of whate, same as the first fiddler doth with his bow, in parson's gallery. Ah, the voice of 'un is foine, with no more nor half a gallon; and him goin' on for nine little 'uns now! You've took a girt lump off my mind, sir. And the Lord will bless 'e for doing of it; and the bootiful young leddy likewise."

However there was no great lump taken off the captain's own mind, as he walked home with Rose; who had formed her own sensible conclusions. Neither was his relief increased, when he met Betty Sage, going home to the village, with a big sheaf of gleaning on her back, which poked her old bonnet down over her eyes, and chafed her with stings of ingratitude.

"That's the way, we poor volk zwets," cried Betty, instead of "Good evening, sir!" while she scratched at some fly, in the nape of her neck. "And the young leddies goo'th about in zilks and zatins, with zun-kivers up, when the zun be gone down!"

"Don't be so cross, Mrs. Sage," said the captain—the worst advice that can be given

to a virtuously indignant female. "Turn in at my gate, and have a draught of cider."

"I don't want none o' your zider, nor the 'toxicating stuff as you makes of harmless apples. Bain't zour, bain't zour enough to zet my teeth up. But I'll give e' a bit of advice, cappen. You look to your own house more sharper. You knows no more of what be going on, than a marly-scarly."

"Run on, Rose, my dear, and see whether Moggy has peppered the mushrooms. Now what is it you want to say, Mrs. Sage?"

"Nort, sir. I never says nort of my thinkings. But they all comes true, without words to them. You've got a bad man, about your place, cappen. A vule to look at, and a vule to talk to; but 'a may make vules of them, as holds theirselves more cleverer."

"I suppose you mean Sam Slowbury, then?"

"I shan't say who I mane, or who I don't mane. A' looketh as straight as a crowbar. But a' hath as many ins and outs, as the pocket of a crab fish."

"There are times of everything," thought Mr. Arthur, as old Betty trudged away; for he by dint of lonely work was become a meditative man; "times of trouble, times of peril, times of

poverty, and—worst of all, times of perpetual advice. What will my next time be, I wonder. Probably one of perplexity."

He could scarcely have made a better guess, what though—as every prize-poet always puts it—he had added, to the wisdom of the snakes of Wistman's wood, the rapid acumen of the moorland fox—that reynard who dwells in the centre of a tor, and will not be dug out by the deepest archæologist.

For behold, on the following day, there were puffs of smoke in the breezy distance, and far away sounds of feeble pops, such as a little boy makes with a foxglove. Now this was General Punk, in pursuit of the colonel's grouse, who had not behaved well, but maintained an ungrateful attitude. From first to last, they could scarcely have cost anything under a guinea apiece; and their duty was, to get up at the proper distance, and tumble down again, when the gun went off. But instead of that, what they did, was this. No sooner did they see a man, half a mile away—the very man perhaps to whom (after Providence, and their parents) they owed everything, than away they went, like a flight of stars shooting upon the horizon, instead of being shot. And the one or two,

that did have the manners to lie decently, never fell at all, when they were shot at; but appeared to receive no more injury from lead, than a patient does from pills, at which he shakes his head externally.

This might have been explained very naturally, if none but General Punk had shot at them. But when Mr. Short, who was a first-rate marksman, had fired three times, without bagging a feather, and the colonel, who was also tolerably straight, had banged more than once, with no better result, *Nous*, who had done his very utmost, came, with the young lemon setter, who had listened to his orders, and sat down, and looked at the four gentlemen, General Punk, Colonel Westcombe, and Jack, and his own valued master, with a gaze of sad inquiry. There was no contempt in it, or at any rate not much, for he had known such things occur before; and he was not a cynical dog, but capable of much indulgence to human errors. His beautiful brown eyes simply said—"Well, gentlemen, you have done very badly. Perhaps you sat up too late, last night. But do try to pull yourselves together; or else you will ruin this young dog here, who is out for the first time, and has not had my experience."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mr. Short; "John Sage is at the bottom of all this. Westcombe, you put the grouse under his care; and he has made them as wary as himself. John can bag things; but who could bag him?"

"Passon be so peart," answered old John, with a grin; "I've a'knowed 'un bag a man, and let 'un goo out of the bag."

"Well done, John!" exclaimed the colonel, with a laugh. "Short, you'd better let old John alone, till Sunday. Come gentlemen, I can see our luncheon on the hill, and Miss Touchwood come to enliven it. Let us have it; and then put our barrels straighter. Jack, you have not had one shot yet."

"'Tis better to have shot, and missed, than never to have shot at all;" said the vicar, with a knowing glance at his young companion; "Jack, you are in the dumps to-day. And general, even you, on your pony, have not brought so much as a hat down."

"I never shoot at hats, without heads inside them," answered the general; and again the parson got the worst of his own wit.

But after luncheon, as usually happens, a different state of things set in. Julia was there, with sparkling eyes, brighter than the colonel's

best champagne; and most radiant she showed herself, to every one but Jack, whom she treated with a dignified reserve. Then they laid out their plan for the afternoon, to shoot in two divisions; for a brace of old pointers had come with the food. Colonel Westcombe, and Mr. Short, were to go in one direction, while the general and Jack, with old John to help them, were to follow up a mark, and take the likeliest places, towards the eastern boundary of the moors; where they might find partridges as well as grouse, for the day of St. Giles was with them.

As it happened, the course of the sport led this division of the party towards Christowell; and the general, with John Sage to load his gun, and lead the grey pony, when needful, parted company for some time with young Westcombe, who had hit upon a family of wild ducks, and went after them down a marshy glade.

"Sage, who lives in yonder cottage in the hollow?" asked General Punk, pointing down to Lark's cot; "what a sweetly romantic spot! Have they got any beer? My throat is quite parched, and I have had enough of shooting. The road is not so very bad. I shall just

ride down. They will not refuse a tired man a glass of ale, I dare say. The good folk about here are always hospitable."

"The gentleman as liveth there, be zummut of a rum 'un, and kapeth volk out of's pramishes mainly. But he be a girt friend of Passon Shart; and if so be, you spakes the name of passon, he'll not denai thee zummut to wash down the pillum. Cappen Larks be the name of 'un."

"Very well; then you stop here, my man," said the general, handing his gun to John; "for fear of our losing Mr. Westcombe altogether. And when you have let him know where we are, you can come, and lead my pony up the hill again."

Mr. Arthur was aware that his friend Short had been asked to join the shooting party; and as the west wind brought the sound of fowling-pieces, he thought it not unlikely that the parson might come down from the moor, for a glass of his cider. To meet this chance, he begirt himself to a troublesome task of pruning, to take out a thicket of dead wood, from an ancient, and thoroughly crabbed apple-tree—a stern aboriginal of the place, unshapely, uncouth, ungenial, standing out with snags and

tatters, yet knuckled here and there with clumps of fruit, as thick as a pile of toadstools. Ungainly, nubbly, fruit it was, as hard and tough as hartshorn, raspy, to the teeth, and fetching strong language out of the lips of the biter. Nevertheless, there was no such apple on the place, to bring out, and tarten up, the flavour of the gentle ones in cider; as a vein of adversity braces, and brightens, the mellowness of the genial mind. Therefore, and for the sake of contrast with the cones of shapely culture round it, the captain spared this ancient crab, and let it follow its own bent.

Working upon his light double ladder here, and taking out the dead wood with a little curved saw, he commanded the view of the track from the downs, which scarcely deserved to be called a road. And presently he espied a figure, which clearly was not Mr. Short's, coming slowly down the hill upon a fat grey pony. "A soldier, as sure as I'm alive," thought the captain; "I seem to know that peculiar seat. But he looks very feeble, and in trouble. I must go and help him."

Getting down from his ladder, he unlocked a little spiked gate in the fence, and went to meet the stranger. The general was in danger.

for the steepness of the hill had jarred his wounded leg, and he could scarcely keep the saddle; while the old grey pony, who had a will of his own, was threatening to make a rush of it. Then the captain ran up, and took the pony by the head, and the old man, tired, and trembling, and in agony, fell forward, and rested on the other's shoulder. Mr. Arthur supported him, and looked up at him, and told him to rest himself there for a while.

"God bless me!" cried the general, "who are you? If my name is Punk, I can swear that yours is Pole."

CHAPTER IV.

THE WAY THE CAT JUMPS.

THE behaviour of a man, who has long been "under a cloud," when he finds that cloud rent open, depends very much upon his constitution; and his constitution is made up of a quantity of constituents. Towards the milder, and larger half of life, the mind begins to work, on its own account, and to seek its own wages, after a generation of steady discipline, and useful reverence. Disturbing influences (such as universal brotherhood, dread of illiberality, the worship of women, and nature, and the like, and the dreams of perfection, as illusive as herself) settle down into a wholesome desire to do one's best, and believe in it. But there still remains the tender love of the few, who still depend upon him.

Captain Larks had never set up to be a man of particular largeness. He could not abstract

himself into great thoughts, and soar in a circumference far above his head. He liked his little jobs, and stuck very close to them, and was vexed, when they did not turn out well. And the stir of little interests kept him fresh, and sweet to mankind, and manly.

"You are tired, and weak, and in pain," he said to the old man, who had discovered him; "my cottage is a little way down this lane. Come, and rest there, until you feel well again."

"But you don't mean to tell me, that you are not Pole!" the general replied, as he yielded gladly to the strong man's aid, and guidance.

"My name is Pole. And I take you to be the General Punk, under whom I had the honour—— 'Fire and Punk' was your pet name, sir."

"So it was, so it was," the old man answered; "and I wish it was still, Pole; I wish it was still. Ah, those were the days, it was life to live in! But you——"

"Consider me as one you have never seen before; and yet who is only too glad to have the chance of doing you the smallest service."

General Punk was in too much pain, to care to talk of any one, except himself. And he

graciously submitted to be led down the hill, and taken off his pony by careful hands, and helped into the cool, and shadowy cottage.

"What a delightful nook!" he said; "take care of my leg, my dear young lady. Ah, I see, by your smile, that I need not tell you. Now don't begin supposing that I have got the gout. No such luck. It is ten times worse. Not that I mean to take the smallest notice of it. Half an hour's rest will quite set me up again. Now what is your name, my pretty dear? An old man may take liberties, you know."

"My name is 'Rose Arthur,' sir;" she said, "and I hope to have the pleasure of helping you, a little."

"You have done that already, and more than a little. You seem to feel everything, as if you had got it. But I must soon be off; or I shall lose my dinner."

"It is not to be thought of," said the captain coming forward; "you must submit to our rough fare. To attempt to ride, ten or twelve miles, as you are, is utterly out of the question. I know what an old wound is, when jarred. Rest, and coolness, are the only things for

it. We will send up a message to the game-keeper."

The general vowed that he would not have it so; and got up, to prove his activity. But all that he took by the movement was a thrill of pain, a stagger, and a biting of the lips; because he was too good to swear, in the presence of a lady. "I can't bear to trouble you," was all that he could say; for his bad leg began to get worse very fast.

Now this was a difficult position, for all three, the general, the colonel, and the captain; as well as for younger people, whose affairs were involved in what might come of it. The worst case of all was the general's; because he could not get away from it, and was driven, by the irony of facts, to shout for a man disgraced out of the army. No one could lift him, except this man; for the general was heavy, towards the centre of his system; and he wanted a good deal of lifting, and refreshment, whenever Dr. Perperaps had poked at him.

Colonel Westcombe also felt the urgency of things. Here was a guest of his by right, driven by the force of circumstances, into alien shelter. He felt it his duty to follow him up, and see that he was treated properly. But how

could he do so, against the broad fact, that he was not wanted over there?

"My dear," he said quietly to Miss Touchwood, "you are very young; but you know much more of the ways of the present world, than I do. It happens, that I cannot well go over now, through peculiar circumstances, with which I will not trouble you."

"I know that there is a maze of mystery among them," answered Julia, who was generous, and by no means always spiteful; "but, Uncle John, they are to be pitied, not condemned; until people get to the bottom of it. Write a kind letter, an exceedingly kind letter, to General Punk, congratulating him, upon having fallen upon his legs—no, that might seem too personal—upon being thus among good Samaritans; and say you will only be too happy to send the carriage, with the soft linings, for him; as soon as the doctor lets him up."

"I think that would be rude," replied Colonel Westcombe; "not to him, I mean, but to his entertainer. You are right about writing a letter, my dear; but it must not be to the general. It must be to poor Pole himself."

"Pole! Who is he?" the young lady asked. "How many more aliases has he got? There

must be some very great secret somewhere. Uncle John, shall we ever understand it?"

"Perhaps not," replied the colonel, with a smile at her quick manner; "and if so, it will be a little lesson to us, to attend to our own business."

"I cannot regard it, from that point of view, with any satisfaction. Because it appears to me so wrong, and so dishonest, to get into society, under false pretences. The thing of all others that annoys me most, is that my own mother, who has never been taught to bridle her curiosity, sits down before that mysterious man, as if she quite feared to say, 'how do you do?' —because the question might seem inquisitive. And then our poor Dicky is afraid of him too. In the name of the Seven Wonders, who is the man? I am sure, by your face, that you know. Now tell me; or I won't say a single word, all dinner-time to-day."

"You never would punish both us, and yourself, to that extreme, dear Julia. Your nature is to talk; and you cannot help it. But if other people don't want to talk, what right have we to force them?"

Captain Larks, on the other hand, as every man has his own regard, felt most strongly,

that of all this trouble the worst part fell on his own shoulders. He was under no debt of friendship, whatever, to General Punk, thus forced upon him; and to have his little cottage thus again invaded, was a trial to even his serenity. "I know what old Punk is," he said to himself; "and I never shall forget, how he scowled at me, upon the saddest occasion in all my life. He was bound to do so, by his own ideas; and by those I must measure him. But how differently Westcombe looked at me! There are times in one's life, when the value of it hangs upon a single gaze. I must do my best for this man, of course. But it will not be from gratitude."

It was not the trouble to his little household, that vexed him—although that was no trifle,—nor even the untimeliness of the occurrence, just when his own affairs were pressing; but what disturbed him chiefly, was the difficulty about Colonel Westcombe.

There are some few men, come across, at far and casual intervals, whom we grieve to have never met, at the age when there was friendship. It is not for their fame, or deeds, or virtues, that we long to know them; but because there is something in them, heart-akin

to our own hearts. We care not, what their views may be, in politics, in literature, or any of the passing fancies of the day; but we say to ourselves—"here is a man, whom we must have loved, if we had only had the luck." And then, we sigh, that it is now too late; and fall back upon our old acquaintance.

However, it is a very ill wind, that blows no good to any one. And although young Westcombe was abashed, at first, by this sudden turn of things, and obliged to keep sadly in the back-ground—wherein he found a big black tor, to sit upon, and watch the smoke, whose lower breath had gone into the general's sick broth—before very long, things turned up so, that he could come in for his own share of them.

Partly no doubt, this was owing, as it generally is, to diligent exertions of his own. For he ventured to call, without violent intrusion, upon Dr. Perperaps; because he was in a condition of throat, which loudly demanded liquorice.

"You must be very careful," said the doctor; "breathe just a little hard. Thank you, sir, thank you. As yet there is nothing to arouse solicitude. But we must not rest

content with such condition of the tonsils. The trachea also shows premonitory symptoms. The earliest indications of scarlet—but I will avoid language, that might make you perhaps susceptive. My dear young sir, I would entreat you, to abstract your mind from disquietude. This little instrument proclaims to me, that all is not quite right just here;" the doctor tapped his waistcoat over several parts, for fear of hitting the wrong one; "it is well that you have applied to me, in this early stage. Has there been anything, anything external, to set up internal phlogitis?"

"I borrowed some very bad tobacco last night, from an old man of ours, whom I met upon the moor; and while I was thanking him, I swallowed a strong whiff."

"You should have consulted me at once, my dear sir. But I trust sincerely that it is not too late. You require an emultient, then a sedative, and after that a due course of tonics. Spotty, my dear, shake up No. 77."

Established thus upon a course of medicine, (all of which followed the course of the river), Jack Westcombe found himself upon a healthy road, to get near his darling Rose, once more. Youths of the present day, who dash headlong

over every obstacle betwixt them and their loves —when assured that the money bag is on the right side of it—never would put up with such little items of scruples, as stopped Jack Westcombe. And even he was inclined, at last, to push aside punctilio; as he found the season passing, and his love no nearer gathering. Then, as usual, fairer aid appeared, and seduced him into side-long tricks. Sporetta hated Julia Touchwood, who had snubbed her nobly; and she knew, that Julia had a weakness for the son of her godfather.

One day, at the top of the village, she met that nobly-principled young man, coming from his course of medicine, at her father's home of health. Jack was casting sheep's eyes up the road, that led to the captain's gate; but sternly bracing his mind towards the footpath leading to Farmer Willum's, where he now put up his horse. Then Spotty declared her own opinion.

"I call you no better than a muff," said she. "How can you carry on like this?"

"Like what, Miss Perperaps!" he inquired, looking at her loftily; "I scarcely understand your question."

"You know what I mean, well enough. Why don't you go in, and win?"

"You still speak in parables;" answered he, with a desire to be off; but a stronger desire to hear out her words.

"Why don't you show a little pluck? Or, if that is not fine enough language for you, a little determination? You love Rose; and Rose loves you. Why don't you checkmate the old fogies?"

"Really you seem to take a most kind interest in my affairs, Miss Perperaps! Who told you, that Miss Arthur ever even deigned to think of me?"

"Bosh!" exclaimed the lady; "it is plainer than a pikestaff. But I am not going to tell you all I know." With that she showed her new boots, and said "Good day!"

"This is most unfair, and most unfeeling;" cried Jack, going after her, as she knew he must do. "Miss Perperaps, my dear and kind Miss Perperaps, I beg you to explain yourself, and not to run away."

"I thought it was you, that were in such a hurry. But my dear father wants me. I have ten dozen pills to make up, before five o'clock. Good day, Mr. Westcombe."

"I'll make the pills. Or I'll come and help you. And you can have mine, to begin with;

I have got at least three dozen here; and I can spare them."

"Oh, you have got some fun in you, after all," Spotty replied, with a very broad grin; "I thought you were a stick, and took them all. My father considers you a splendid patient."

"So I am; so I am. The most devoted. Oh, I won't get well for a year, Miss Perperaps; if you will only tell me, what you meant just now."

"I meant just what I said," she answered, sitting on a roadside slab, to talk. "Miss Arthur is as fond of you, as you are of her."

"That is a simple impossibility. If you could only tell me, what makes you think so, how I would, how I should—it would be so nice of you!"

"Well, I owe you a good turn, or two; and I can't bear to see your tongue so white. Did you ever pick an oak-apple, in the Fingle Valley?"

"Yes, I found a very pretty one, fluted like a love-knot; and I ventured to give it to Miss Arthur, just to look at. And I don't think she gave it back to me."

"Of course, she did not. Is this like it?

I stole it out of her most sacred corner, where she keeps her dead mother's handkerchiefs. And as soon as she missed it, what a way she was in! Though of course, she pretended not to care one rap. She has not the least idea that I have got it; or gentle as she is, she would slap me, I believe. And that's not all, that shows the way the cat jumps. For I began to run you down, one day, on purpose to torment her. And her eyes—my goodness, you will have to look out, when she is Mrs. Westcombe!"

"You have made me so happy, I could kiss your hands, after you have rolled a thousand pills. But after all, it is not very much, when one comes to think of it."

"Then go, and get more, you insatiable young man. But I tell you, it is everything. Do you think I don't know, what girls are? Shake yourself together well; and go, and pop the question."

"What a practical mind you have!" he answered, with much admiration. "But how am I to do it, when I can't get in? I am under no promise about it now: but still there is a general understanding, that I am to be——"

"Backward in coming forward. Very well;

don't let me advise you; or when the days of repentance come, you will say—'she did it.' My Step said that to my beloved parent, about somebody unknown, when they had a little scrimmage, last Sunday night. Therefore I would advise you strongly, not to be anywhere, this evening."

"But how can I help being somewhere? You know where I ought to be; and you will not tell me."

"How sharp you are! You've been eating sparrow-pie. But whatever you do, fight shy, this evening, of the captain's leather-coat apple-tree. Where the hill comes up under the cliff, you know, at the highest corner of his property. Somebody goes there every evening, with her heart in her mouth, to peep over the moor; and it would never do, for you to be there too."

"Undoubtedly, I should be an interloper. I thank you for warning me to keep my distance. Miss Perperaps, I hear that Betty Sage is ill. I hope it is nothing serious."

"Not much, for her. She ate three hedgehogs, for breakfast, on Tuesday; and they were not well baked. Her appetite was good, and she swallowed some spines; and she says that they have stuck fast in her own. But

you had better tell John, to keep away from home. He will have sense enough to do that, when he knows it. His Betty would say, that it was all his fault; although he was a dozen miles out of sight; and then she might die, to prove it. But I have taken her out of father's hands; and she begins to perceive the difference. If she is only left to me, she will come round, for certain. But if my father gets another turn at her, it will be a very narrow squeak indeed. I have told her, to shut up her pill-trap against him."

"What do you think of the general's case, as you seem to form your own opinions so? When will he be able to come back to us?"

"I can't tell. My father is getting sadly jealous; he won't let me have a turn at that old shaver. I belong to the positive school. Kill or cure, is my ticket for soup."

"And the right one, I believe;" Jack answered mildly, for he had not had time to think of it; and Spotty's strong views were strange to him; "the next time I ring the bell, I shall ask,—is Doctor Miss Perperaps at home, and her father gone away, so as not to spoil her practice?"

"I wish you would. I'd give a guinea, if

you would; and I've only got one against my bill at Mother Cork's. My Step would get the message, and my criky, she would stare! But you haven't got the spirit to do it; any more than you have, to go near the crab-tree to-night. Good-bye."

CHAPTER V.

UNDER THE CRAB-TREE.

NOTHING can be further from the mark than to take a man, and how much more a woman, strictly according to self-appraisement. Nature has provided us, with things to think of, far more important than our own concerns—our neighbours in the first place, and politics, and the weather, and the last new murder, and the last old judicial joke—for our judges now are our finest jokers—and if we ever get home again, to think about ourselves at all, modesty steps in, and spoils the balance.

Conspicuous among the men, who underrate themselves, was Dr. Perperaps, of Christowell.

He felt that he ought to be more than he was; and his views were exceedingly scientific. But no outlet for them, and no income from them, as well as the recent death of a large

ratepayer, from lockjaw—which everybody said he should have stopped—combined to make him yearn for something solid, a fine, slow case, a protracted cure (if any), and the money on the nail, which he therefore must abstain from hitting on the head too speedily.

Throughout the summer, he had reproached himself, and been reproached by his wife, at pensive periods, for letting Dicky Touchwood get well so prematurely. And now he was resolved to avoid so sad an error, in the new opening offered by the general's bad leg.

"How long will it take?" Mr. Arthur asked him, wistfully. "Not that I have any wish to hurry him, of course. But when will he be able to be moved, with safety?"

"He is an ancient warrior;" the doctor answered warily; "what a privilege it is, to be useful to him! Our country owes everything to these old heroes. And a brother-in-arms, sir, a brother-in-arms——"

"Yes; but how long will he be in my arms? I appreciate the privilege. But I want to know its duration. Because I have to make some arrangements of my own."

"My dear sir, the first physician in England could not tell you. I have scarcely had time

for even an elementary diagnosis yet. My impression,—observe that I do not state it as more than a rudimentary impression,—is that the hero of a hundred fights has got suppressed gout, in his system. I have tested him gently for arthritic indications; but he strongly objects to being tested."

"I heard him request you, to go to the Devil."

"It was a truly consistent request; and tended to confirm my diagnosis. Gouty patients do that always; forgetting what would happen to themselves, when left behind. But, my dear sir, if you cannot entertain this distinguished visitor, in his sad distress, perhaps. I could contrive, without much danger, to have him brought down to my humble abode."

This made the captain look as fierce as Pharaoh; and the doctor facetiously held up his bamboo, to protect himself; and therewith made off.

"What must be, must," thought the other, as he went about his work quite cheerfully; "old Fire and Punk seems very much at home. But he is not the man, to be long upon his back. If it were not for that pompous rogue of a Perperaps, Punk would be up, and

off, to-morrow. Wait a bit. Something will arise, within a week, to change the situation.

Something arose within an hour, to change the situation largely. What man, having begun a job, can bear to leave off at three-quarters done? When he has only done a little, it may be in his power to lay his tools down, and go away, muttering to himself,

"*Dimidium facti, qui bene cœpit, habet.*"

But when he has got beyond the half (which comes none the sooner, for the mere beginning) his spirit is up; and his eyes, and fingers, itch to admire the end of it. And this is the spirit of the mighty artist.

Mr. Arthur, in his little way, was a mighty artist. He could so enwrap himself in his work, as to let everything else slip off; like water, from the plumage of a sweetly oily duck. And he had that fine desire to complete a job well, through want of which, so many men of genius fail. He had now begun at that leathery crab-tree,—not at all a pleasant job, to a gardener of high art; because it was a crude, cantankerous subject. But his mind was set upon it, to make good the interruption of the general's disaster, a few days ago.

Now General Punk had been quite terrible, all day; and especially severe to all who did their best to help him. If anybody whispered that, "he would very soon be better," the strongest words were helpless, to express his indignation; and he scowled at such atrocity.

Even Rose, to whom he had been courteous, and gentle, in his very worst pangs hitherto, had been obliged, this day, to relieve his tongue, which suffered (in sympathy with his system) from repression, by making some very hasty exits. And Moggy said, without euphemism he was "nort but an auld divil."

Towards eventide, Miss Arthur, who had enough to do among them, came out for a breath of sweet-languaged air, and the freedom of dwelling with larger things. She had always loved the great moorland view, and the calm ennoblement of the hills, as they drew the sinking light around them, and fostered every farewell glance. She loved to see, how they yielded rank, to the larger lands behind them, and accepted shadow, as they cast their own, in stately grades subordinate.

Our minds must be very much improved, no doubt, from the condition of the old British mind, as it used to work, not more than

a hundred years ago. When it wants to describe a thing, the mind makes words, or at any rate, doubles up the old ones into new cocked-hats, and is proud of having found out something fresh. Upon this new windfall, out dash a score of other minds; as a yardful of sparrows gives chase to the one, who has fatally found pie-crust; or as men run after the man, who has hit upon a scampish trick, that pays. The great artists are the men who have taught our eyes to see, and our tongues to speak.

Now this fine sense of abstract beauty should —if it did its business well—suffice to keep the mind, from dwelling on little side-issues of its own. But it is to be observed, in the history of all great artists, that the largest perception of "the beautiful" never has so sufficed at all. They are full of it, possessed, inspired, radiant; but the expansion of their minds has its little puckers still.

How much more then, is this to be expected, when the mind, inspired by large outlook, is only that of a poor young maiden, left to its own philosophy! There was comfort in the quiet of the hills to her, and a soothing power in the evening light; but still her heart came through her mind; as the round fruit blushes

through the glistening of the leaves. And her heart, though not put into words, was full of something, and somebody. For surely, with the better half of mind, there is nothing more grievous, than to think, and think, and have nothing to say about any of it; and the breast, and the hearty parts, that go on very well (if the brain will only let them have their turn) must come up sometimes, and say, that they too have a share in the system.

There had been many things combining (as things generally do) to come down upon Rose, and torment, and vex her, to the furthest boundary of her large, and gentle patience. To a proud, quick-minded, and sensitive girl, it was no small pain, to begin with, to see how her father was behaving towards his unexpected guest. Her father evidently knew full well, why the general was so polite to him, —coldly polite, not even swearing, when the captain was in the room. The latter never stayed longer than to discharge the duties of a host, with a pleasure as stiff as a formal dinner-party.

Then while he was doing it, the general watched him, with a supercilious gaze, tempered now and then, when his pains came on, with a cross indignant pity.

"What can my father have done?" thought Rose; "What can he have done, to lead to this? He never can have deserved it; but what induces him to put up with it—he who is one of the proudest of mankind?"

Moreover, she was troubled, to the limit of her untried capacity for trouble, by the colonel's conduct. What made him keep away, so entirely from them, and only send inquiries, by some servant, or casual visitor across the moor? And why did her father seem to think that right, when her own sense told her that it was quite wrong?

Over, and above, and perhaps below these thoughts, were many, no less grievous, touching the tenderness of her own cares. Without confession to herself, or any direct discussion of the subject, somehow or other, she had been led to think so highly of young Mr. Westcombe, that he seemed to be the one to solve all this.

But not even once had he been near her, to the utmost of her knowledge, since, under the ash-tree, he had seemed to set his heart, upon her kindly thoughts of him. "No doubt, he despises me, as everybody else does," was the bitter conclusion of her poor young heart;

"when people live in mystery, they must expect it. I will be like my father; I will disdain them all; although it is most uncomfortable."

Thinking thus, she looked towards the west; as people out of doors do mainly, when their spirits are in declination. She was standing inside her father's fence; which was hard to climb just there, and gave her strong sense of security. After her recent scare, she feared to wander in the lower ground alone; but here she could see any sign of approach, and might run away home, without being cut off. And the rise of the ground gave her plenty of height, to look over the fence, to the long sweep of moor, and the coving of the combes, that made dark-elbowed shades below them.

Why should the human race, or any other, have two eyes—till their brethren knock out one—unless it is, to see two things at once? By a thousand arguments, it may be shown that the large, benevolent, orthodox, intelligent, and intelligible, law of nature, was—that binocular beings should squint. For the first week of our lives, we all do so; and if wisely let alone, we might retain that gift. But the nurses go against it; and the supple sequacity,

which has been nursed into us from our cradles, induces one eye to go after the other, and becomes shackled to it; in spite of the nose, which was meant to keep them independent. After this, what reasonable hope can we have of objectivity?

Without the large outlook, vouchsafed to those mortals, whose twain eyes turn outward, Rose Arthur contrived to see two figures, at the very same moment, though far apart, and quite invisible to each other. One was in a swampy goyal, partly lit by sunset, through a gap in the western heights above; and the other was on the hill-front, towards her, rapidly descending.

The one, in the goyal, had something, that looked like a long gun, on his shoulder; and he suddenly turned into a shadowy corner, and so far as she could make out, sat down. The other came hastily into the track, where the general had met with his disaster, lately; and then running down to the little spiked gate, looked through, and saw her, and implored to be let in.

"Why should I let you in?" asked Rose, doubtfully, feeling for her key.

"Why should you keep me out?" asked the

other, "it is very important that I should come in."

"Perhaps it would be rude to keep you out. But this is not the proper way to call; nor the proper time of day, to expect to get in. But you may come in, Mr. Westcombe."

"It is most kind of you to let me in," said Jack, taking care to get inside, before the young lady could change her mind; and then looking at her with steadfast eyes, which expressed an enormous stock of admiration, and a mild determination, to make something of it. "But it would have been a cruel thing, to keep me out. You never do cruel things, do you, Miss Arthur?"

"No, Mr. Westcombe; or if I ever do, I am always sorry afterwards. I am obliged to kill things, very often. What can we do with slugs, and grubs?"

"But if you have pity for them," said Jack; "nasty marauders as they are; how sorry you must be, to trample on your own poor fellow-creatures!"

"But I never do anything of the kind," Rose answered, looking at her little feet to make quite sure; "unless you mean poor Squire Touchwood."

"No, I don't mean him. I wish I did; the more you trample upon him, the better. I mean one a little better, at any rate, than that fellow; though a very humble individual still. If you look at me, you will see my sad meaning."

Rose smiled very sweetly, as she looked at him, and said—"If you have been trampled on, you bear it very well. You show no signs of ill-usage; but rather every symptom of happiness, and self-content. Mr. Westcombe, in what way are you pitiable?"

"Well perhaps, for the moment, rather less so than usual; because in a certain sweet presence, I am always pervaded with a sudden rush of happiness. It is like coming out of the shade into the light, from the winter to the summer, from a coal mine to a meadow full of bright flowers, and sunshine. Don't laugh now; that is too bad of you. I know that I am not at all poetical—but still——"

"Well, I think you are very poetical indeed. Squire Dicky never said anything, half so fine. He only said two things at all poetical; though he seemed to be trying, very hard, and very brilliantly."

"Oh tell me, what his two flights of poetry were. I never should have dreamed, that he could do so much as that."

"Yes, he did. He told me once, that he would rather sit, and look at me, than see a badger drawn, by his best dog, 'Bob.' And another time, he said, that the sound of my voice was sweeter than the tinkle of a new tap of pale ale, running into a three quart jug."

"So it is. He was quite right. But how could you resist him, after such a noble flight of poetry? I should have been quite terrified; if I had known he was so clever."

"One must grow capable of more, and more resistance, as one grows older rapidly." This gave the talk a serious turn, and made them look at one another; the result of which was as usual.

Rose thought, how noble, and how simple was his mind; and his heart so soft, and excellent; and his outward form quite good enough, to defend her, and be managed by her. Jack thought how lovely, and how sweet she was; with at least as much mind as any husband wants, and a heart that his own yearned after. Their eyes met gently; and he drew her to him.

"Darling Rose," he said; "how long, am I to be uncertain, what you mean? You are

not one of the flimsy kind, who have no heart worth having. Your nature is noble, steadfast, grand."

"There is nothing very grand about me," she said, prolonging the sweet surrender; "if you think that, you will be sadly disappointed."

"But give me the chance of the disappointment. I ask for you, only as you are; according to my own account, not yours. You promised to think kindly of me. Have you done it? Have you been able to do it, sweet Rose?"

"I have done it. And I have made up my mind, that I like you, as well as—as well as you like me."

"Liking has nothing to do with it, Rose. Do you love me, as I love you?"

"You must not be too hard upon me. I have never had this to do, before. But I do love you, John, a great deal better than myself."

"Then you will give yourself to me," John Westcombe said; and perceiving that her eyes were bright with tears, as she bowed her head, he laid the head gently upon his shoulder, and kissed away the tears; and then found it essential to kiss the trembling lips as well; because there were symptoms of a happy sob between them.

"Now you are mine; for ever mine;" he was whispering, in the most lovely rapture; when a stern voice came, from behind the crab-tree.

"Halloa, sir! What are you doing there?" And the voice was followed by a tall man striding, who took Rose from Jack, as a bird whips a feather from another bird's nest, and said,—"Go home directly. I will speak to you, by-and-by." Then, to John Westcombe, he spoke disdainfully—

"Sir, I had imagined, that you were a man of honour."

"Don't be so hasty, sir," Jack answered; for he possessed the true basis of all courage—self-command; "I am not ashamed of anything that I have done, sir."

"Of course, you are not. You consider it no harm whatever, to have broken your parole."

"You forget, sir, how the time goes by. I have broken no parole. I pledged myself, for the fishing season; because you allowed me to come up your water. Not that I cared for the fishing, two tails of a gnat; but that I could see your house. When the fishing expired, my bond expired. And the trout in the Christow are beginning to prepare to spawn

before very long; as Mr. Short says, who understands them well. And Mr. Short says, that it has been agreed, by all who understand the subject, that the fishing in these upper waters ceases, upon partridge-shooting day. And that was a week ago almost; so that I have taken no advantage, but purposely left it all on your side."

"I am sorry for your sake," said the captain, looking at him, so that Jack's grey eyes went down; "that your honour can be satisfied, with such flimsy stuff as this. To use it as an argument, is an insult to me; or else a disgrace to your own self. Say rather, that you were overcome by youthful haste; and then I will endeavour to respect you again."

This to a young man of Jack's shy pride, was almost too bitter to put up with, even from the father of his Rose. His solid face worked, and his grey eyes flashed, with the strain he was putting upon himself. If he had spoken what was upon his lips, he must have lost his love for ever; so bitter was his thought; and so resolute the nature, which it would have outraged. For it was upon his lips to say—"Who are you, to talk of honour?

You, who are obliged to hide yourself, and dare not even meet my father!"

But he thought of Rose, just in good time, and said—"Well, sir, perhaps I have been tempted. But I thought it was fair; and I think so still."

"Two words will show you, that it was not fair," Mr. Arthur answered, in a much kinder tone; "possibly you thought, that your promise had expired; but how was I to know, that you thought so? You were bound to let me know, that you would cast off your pledge, instead of doing so, without my knowledge, and taking advantage of my ignorance."

"I never thought of doing such a thing as that," said Jack; "it would have been mean, and low, and snobbish. I never dreamed, that any one could judge me so."

"Very likely not. But you see what comes of being your own judge, and jury. Good evening, now! I will ask you, for no more promises."

"But it never can be your intention to mean," cried the young man, looking as deplorably as he spoke, "that I am to be ordered off your premises, altogether!"

"Not quite so. Let us rather put it thus—you are not to come, until you are invited. And I shall not invite you; until your father wishes it."

"Very well. You can treat me, as you like, sir. But for all that, I am quite resolved to marry your daughter."

"And I am quite resolved that you shall not; in the present condition of things, young man."

The captain looked sternly at Jack, as he spoke; and Jack looked firmly at the captain. Both having strong wills, neither of them said anything more than, "Good evening!"

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD-DUCK HUNT.

THE twilight was now in that interesting stage, with the last blush of day fading out of the heavens, when the mystery of the moor is grandest, the whisper of tremulous love most thrilling, and the quack of the mallard most ecstatic. For this is the moment, when that noble bird, (after sleeping the day out, on a breezy pool, or among the deep sedges of a lonely water-course,) with slow flaps, and stretches, gets out of his bed, and draws up his red feet tingling. Then he opens the valves of his nostrils, and utters a little sharp snort to his family. With a few strong beats, he is up and away, along the crystal bars of light, and the sprinkle of his rise falls far behind. The flush of his start has set all the others off; and the silvery sound of wings flows back, as the cleft air closes, and the dusk is left behind

But he, with velocity of instinct, guiding all his race to health and food, himself the head of the rapid arrow, high above the ups and downs of earth, urges his powerful pinions, strains his long neck through the whistling air, and sleeks all the plumage of his breast with speed. Until, in the stagnant scene below him, he espies the little place, he wants to be in,—either a malty-looking barley stubble, or an oasis of fat green ooze, or the glistening gem of a lonely pond, chastely enamelled with fat black slugs. Here he descends, as the stars begin to blink; makes the circuit once, with his family behind him; all peering for the hateful human race. Then spying none of that, flop they breast the water, ploughing up less of it than could be expected, but flinging it largely behind them, as they dash, helter-skelter, through the cataract of their own rapture.

These are general facts; but the very fine family of ducks, now dealt with, conformed very fairly with ancestral usage. Neither was it contrary to experience (the race of man, and gun, being equally abundant) that while they were rollicking in their first delight, a big gun flamed at them, from forth a traitor bush, and five unblemished birds turned their poor toes

up; while the rest, without halting to lament, took wing.

"I've gived them pepper," cried the man, who had been doing it; "never made a finer shot in all my life. But it don't seem so easy to come at 'em, as I thought. Shall have to get wet up to my middle, I'm afeared."

This was the man, whom Rose had seen afar, following the seam down the hill-front. And now he stood gazing at the dusky pool, begirt with peaty swamp, and sedge, which the little moorland rills had made. There were his victims, far out of reach, and not to be pelted to the other side with stones, even if stones had been at hand; neither was there any wind, to drive them ashore. He doubted for a moment, whether he should leave them so, and return in the morning, with a dog to fetch them out. But his home was some miles away; and he determined, at any rate to have a try for it. "Dare say, it ain't so very deep after all," he muttered to himself contemptuously; "I'll pull off my togs, and go in for 'em."

Raiment was not very plentiful with him; so he carefully laid what would spoil, upon a rock; then he drew the stout ramrod from his gun, to probe the depth before him, and stepped

in bravely. At first, the swamp was shallow, scarcely taking him knee-deep; and beginning to laugh at his own misgivings, he waded with his ramrod swinging. Then suddenly, down he went, over head and ears, not in clear water, but in black quagmire, floundering, and flapping, like a fly in beer and treacle. His mouth was filled with sludge, and his eyes dabbed up with slough-crust; and his arms could scarcely move, among the clog, and clam, they battled with. The harder he fought, the worse he fared; he could not even tell what way to strike for; everything turned black above him, and his breath went into gurgles.

But just as he was disappearing softly, with only his grey hair left behind, a stout crook of ground ash came into his woollen shirt, and his body was hauled out. John Westcombe, on his way to fetch the pony, had heard the gunshot, and seen the distant flash, and set off as hard as his legs would go, to catch the poacher on his father's beat. He knew the spot well; for it was the very one, to which he had followed another flight of ducks, when he parted from the general on the moor; and he was just in time to rush into the swamp, and keeping on the brink of peat, haul out the poor fellow, at

his last gasp. Strong as he was, and self-possessed, Jack had as much as he could do, to fetch out his burden through the inky slush, and then through the tangle of the swampy margin, without drowning him; if indeed that still remained to do. But the young man, as soon as he got a firm grasp, lifted his load; and the black slime from it trickled among the light green of water-grass.

"You must do your very best to breathe," said Jack, who had never read directions to revive drowned persons; "let me wash the dirt off first; and then you won't have to swallow it. You will get on very nicely, if you don't think about it. I heard him breathe! Now try again, sir; and you shall have a doctor, if you go on well,"

The poor man could not even lift his chest against it; though the helpless droop of his neck showed plainly, that he knew what he was threatened with. "Very well," said Jack, who was quick of observation, "if you will come round, you shall not have him. I will see to you myself; and I am not a doctor."

What sweeter speech can be made to any man, whose spirit is hovering, just conscious of the horrors, it may prefer to leave behind?

With a spirit of recovery, this man drew breath; his nostrils quivered with consolation, and the numb little spring of his heart began to give a weak jog, to go on again. Young Westcombe did to him exactly, what he thought he himself would have wanted, in the like condition; and, by and by, the man sat up, and sneezed, and appeared to seek about for refreshment. "Spirits have I none," said Jack; "but if you could manage a little drop of old Madeira, diluted largely—or to speak more plainly, mixed with good spring-water——"

"Had too much water a'ready," said the man; "and Mydeary wine never goeth well with it."

"Then have it, as it is," advised John Westcombe. The man took his advice, and left a rueful hollow in the shooting-flask, for Jack to go home upon, without a bit of dinner.

"That have done me real good. Never thought to taste no more of such. I knows the very farm where that was growed."

Westcombe was surprised at this, and thought that the poor man's wits were still abroad. But looking at him keenly, in the clear mellow light of the harvest moon, which had now risen grandly, he perceived, on his bare breast and

arms, the tokens of a wandering, outlandish life. There was deep tattooing, in various tints; a heart done in red, where the weak heart beat below; and a chain of little charms, clotted in a lump with mire.

"Let me get my togs on," said the man, looking up at him; "my legs feels, as if they was somebody else's. I must go, and have a wash first. You may trust me; not to run away, sir."

"I never thought of your running away. Why should you want to run away, my friend? Do you suppose, that I want to apprehend you."

"Bah! I know, well enough, what you swells be," said the other, refusing Jack's hand to help him up, although his legs were shaking, and his teeth upon the chatter; "you come to nab me, and nab me you have; and a good job for me, in one way. Think, I don't know you, Squire Westcombe? But I won't make no resistance, sir, after what you done to me."

"I tell you, my friend, that you must be a fool, if you think that I want to punish you. My father never makes a fuss about the wild-ducks. My father is the best man in all the world. And I quite agree with him, in that. Why, even if I had caught you netting grouse,

or partridges; I should never take advantage of you, in this condition. You shall not only go home, as you please, but you shall take your ducks with you, if I can get them. You are a plucky fellow, and you deserve them; and I will not even ask you, what your name is. Now, get your clothes on, and finish up the wine; which you understand, better than I do. If you had been worthy to be called a poacher, you would have known how to get those ducks out."

"Well, sir," said the man, as he went to wash and dress himself; "it is the first time I have tried here. Though I never would have told you so, if you had persecuted."

John Westcombe very easily laid hand upon the wild-ducks, by going round the pool, and wading it, from the opposite bank, where the ground was firm enough. Then he brought them back, and gave them to the gunner, who expected to see him march off with them.

"You have done me a real good turn;" he said, thinking more of this kindness, so far as could be judged, than of Westcombe's gallant act in saving him; "and very few now ever does me a good turn. If it lies in my power, sir—and I believe it do—you shall have a good

return for it. Mean to tell me, that you don't know, who I be?"

"I give you my word," answered Jack, with a smile, "that you may be the man in the moon, for all I know. Only, I don't suppose he is such a good shot."

This compliment pleased the man, almost as much as anything; and his surly manner, which had long been yielding, gave way altogether; as he sat upon a big lump of granite, and spoke with a sad deep tone.

"I'll tell you, who I am, Squire Westcombe, then. My name is 'Gruff Howell,' they call me mostly; and I keep the old inn, by the mines, the *Raven*. I have often seen you pass, sir, both on horseback, and afoot; and the moor-men told me who you was. Happen to be a dinner-party, ordered to our house, next Friday, of some sharp blades, not too partiklar, how their victuals come, so long as they be good. They made a great cue about ducks; there must be two ducks to each end of the table, and Captain Lark's marrowfats, to go with them. Well, sir, we put up the ducks with barley-meal, and settled the very day to stick them, when down come old Reynard, and his vixen, from the tor, with a starving lot of little ones waiting for them;

and away goes our four fat ducks, in a winking. I heard a tremendous quack-quack, in the night, and out of bed I jumped, with this here gun; but I might as well have fired at the moon, or the comet. So I made up my mind to get some wild-ducks instead; for they would set the house on fire, if I crossed them; and the valleys led me on, till I got here."

"You must have got a capital gun," said Jack; "to kill these five ducks so clean, at forty yards. It is more than any gun of ours would do."

"I picked her up in Spain, sir; she is of Spanish make. She will put a shot through a slate, at fifty yards, sir; and that is more than any English gun will do."

"But, when were you in Spain? You are shivering, you are cold. You have been in the tropics, I dare say, too. You are still wet underneath. If you stand about like this, the night air from the hills will pretty nearly make an end of you. Come along; stir up; I will help you homeward."

Gruff Howell was getting very stiff by this time; as a man of three score years and ten deserved to be, after going through so much of long walking, and waiting, with his eyes

upon the stretch, and then falling into mire, and being dragged out, and spread to dry by moonlight.

"Sir, you are wonderfully good," he said; "but I can get home well enough; or sleep in a furze-bush, this fine weather. In the old days, I have had many a worse bed, and got up sprightly in the morning. I have been through more, than ever you could have stood, sir; strong as you are, but not brought up to it."

"I dare say. But you are not very young now. And I have often heard my father say, that men, who have been in hot climates long, are upset altogether by the night-air, on these hills. I shall see you on your road, till I am sure that you are safe. How far is it to the *Raven?* I should say, at a guess, at least five miles."

"Better than that, sir; and all rough walking. But the moon is good, and I know my way. You have got many miles to go home to-night; and you are wet to the skin, and young men gets consumption. Not another step shall you come, with me; as if I was an old woman gone astray. And to tell you the truth, 'twould do me more harm than good,

and stop me from doing any good to you. There is a pair of sharp eyes aspying on me always. But I would like dearly, to have a talk with you; and might be important to you to hear it. When could you make it handiest, to give me a meeting somewhere? Somewhere out upon the moor, I mean."

"Any day, and any time you like," Jack answered; "to-morrow, if it suits you; or perhaps the day after. I want to go to Tavistock to-morrow."

"Well, sir, let me think. To-day is Wednesday. Friday, my dinner is to be, or supper, or whatever they may call it. Would Saturday suit you, to meet me somewhere?"

"Yes, as well as any day; or best of all, I might say; because I am coming towards you that day, for a quiet little bit of shooting. I am coming all alone, and will call upon you, if you like, at your own place, the *Raven*. Or if you like it better, I will meet you somewhere."

"It would never do, for you to come near our house, sir; or at least not to stop there, for any time of talk. But you know the Island Rocks, of course. Would your shooting bring you round that way, about three, or four o'clock, on Saturday?"

"Yes, I might easily manage it so. I am very fond of that wild place. There are widgeon, or teal there, very often. But it is a long way from your house. Bring your Spanish cannon, Howell."

"That I will, sir, with your leave; for I might want her, for self-defence. It is a long way from our place, surely; but so much the better for that, to my thinking. The men as comes to our place now, if they was to see me talking to you, would take me by the scruff of the neck, and pitch me down the old mine-shaft, at road-end. But the crest of the hill is no place for talking. Good-bye, sir, till Saturday."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NOBLEST MAN.

"I CALL it too bad of them all, Uncle John," said Julia Touchwood, that same day, "to run away, and leave us *tête-à-tête*, like this. If they go on so, I shall run away to-morrow, and have an intellectual combat with poor Dicky; or go, and nurse the general—a dangerous, but interesting task; because he will want to swear so dreadfully, yet dare not, in my presence; and I shall drive him to the very verge of suppressed insanity, by sweet ministrations, of the most irksome order. Ah, it would be capital fun! His face is such a study; when his lips are burning for a good round something, and his eyes rolling sadly, at the fair sex in the room."

"Why don't you marry him, my dear?" asked Colonel Westcombe; "You might always enjoy that fine sight then."

"Alas no, dear uncle! Where is your knowledge of mankind? How lavishly, how rapturously, would he swear before his wife; and at her too, before three days were over!"

"Julia, in spite of all your attractions, you will have to put up with an old man, I do believe. Your turn of mind is too sarcastic, too uncharitable, for young men to be pleased with you. They like something softer, something sweeter-natured, something more confiding, and simple, and——"

"And foolish. Very well; they may like what they please—somebody, with about as much brains as themselves. I shall not break my heart for them, Uncle John. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall have old Mr. Short; I can do that, by holding up my finger any day. He is the only one I get the worst of; when it comes to a chaffing-match. And after all, matrimony comes to that. I have no faith in love, or spoony doings, or the heart. The heart is corrupt, and desperately wicked; according to inspired authority. Then what is the good of it? I don't want it; I would rather have a man, with mind, and body, that I must look up to, than a lot of stupid hearts. If Mr. Short's head was at the top of his hat,

I would have him to-morrow; to spite every one, and to rout out that spiteful old Aggett, who insulted me. Don't suppose that I am excited, Uncle John; I am not; I never am; and I never mean to be. Now you can tell me, what you think."

"Well, my dear," said Colonel Westcombe, after looking about a bit, and admiring Julia's flashing eyes, which seemed almost to light up the room, where they sat in the twilight, with the cloth removed; "You must remember that I am quite old-fashioned; that I never have been, what is called a 'ladies' man,' nor even accustomed to smart society; because I was poor; and poor people are stupid—as to worldly views, at least. You may be quite right, as among rich people, in describing marriage as a 'chaffing-match;' and, if so, it is desirable, of course, that the husband should be the best hand at it; so that he may be looked up to. But my view of the question is widely different. I will not trouble you with it."

"Why not, Uncle John?" She spoke in a soft low voice, and did not look at him; for tears were lurking in her proud bright eyes.

"Because, my dear, it would do no good. Your nature in many ways is noble, Julia;

but too fiery, and not at all submissive. If you ever marry, as I heartily hope that you will do—and you have years yet, to consider it—you ought to have some one, as quick of mind as you are; but possessing far more self-command."

"I get it from my mother. I can't help it. I know that I am peppery, and contemptuous. But, oh, Uncle John, how I could adore a man like you, for instance!"

"My dear, you may find a thousand men, of far finer character, than mine ever was; and I find myself growing sadly selfish now. I heartily hope, that you may find one, to suit you, appreciate you, and—and—well I will say it—peg you down; as anybody must, to live happily with you. Mind, I only mean, at first. After that, you would go on well."

"Thank you, Uncle John, for that reprieve. How my self-knowledge is enlarged! If it ever comes to pass, and I am bullied horribly, I shall cry out, on the funeral pyre, 'O Uncle John!' with a loud voice thrice; as the Eastern king did, with the torches under him. And then, will you come, and unbind me?"

"My dear, I do not, at the present moment, recall the situation, to which you refer. I

suppose it is in the *Arabian Nights*. And that reminds me of story-telling. Your mind is a little excited, for the moment; and I have said harsh things to you. Instead of going up, and dwelling upon them, would you like to hear me tell the story, for which you have so often begged, of the noblest man I ever knew?"

"Oh, if you will only tell me that—and it is the very time for it. If he only underwent reproach like me?"

"That he did, Julia. And without deserving it. To screen another from rebuke, and shame. It was one of the saddest things I ever knew; and I have met with many sad ones. But you must allow me not to mention names, or at any rate only christian names; for reasons, which—which are binding still. And you must not speak of it lightly; because it would pain me greatly, if you did so."

"Much as I may want pegging down, Uncle John; I should want it still more, if I could do such a thing. Sit in this comfortable chair, and then begin."

"No, I will sit just where I am. Whenever I go back to those old times, I am ashamed of my present luxury. But come you, and rest

here, my dear child; because my voice is not always clear. Now, are you ready? Then please not to interrupt me, because it throws out my memory; and I have not told that story, for a long while now.

"After the battle of Talavera, which was a very hard-fought field, and by no means decisive, the British army, and I may say the whole Peninsular cause, was in the greatest jeopardy, for several days. Our force was small; we had lost a great many of our very best troops, in the two days of combat; we had no clear knowledge of the position, strength, or intentions of the enemy; we could not trust the Spanish general, to act in concert with us, or even to keep us informed of his movements; the French were in far superior force, both in front, and in our rear; we were hemmed in the narrow valley of the Tagus, between a rapid river, and trackless mountains; worst of all perhaps, or at any rate most depressing, we could count one another's bones with famine. For an entire month, we did not receive so much as ten full rations. The Spaniards did the feeding, and left us to do the fighting. Their men were like dripping-pans; ours like gridirons.

You may suppose, what our condition was, when I tell you, my dear Julia, that the offal of a goat, rank, leathery, reeking, would sell for as much as my best sheep is worth; and that I have seen dainty young officers, who would turn up their noses at cold meat in England, chase the gaunt swine in the forest, and devour the flesh, with the bristles on, raw, and quivering. Spanish ham raw, and without any garlic—and the Spaniards, whose place it was to supply us, even accused us of theft for this!

"What with anxiety, weariness, and famine, we were all very miserable, as you may suppose; many of our best friends lay dead, or wounded—I myself had lost a beloved schoolfellow, as brave a young fellow, as ever breathed, in that terrible charge of the 23rd—; we expected the French to fall upon us, in overwhelming numbers; and as yet, we had not that implicit confidence in our great commander, then Sir Arthur Wellesley, which afterwards made us so irresistible. The wisest of us thought, that the whole scheme of the campaign was wrong (as is now confessed freely), enforced upon our general, perhaps, by the politics of the day. While the more foolish

of us (who were a thousand times as many, naturally) were convinced, by starvation, that the object of the patriotic Spaniards was, to destroy us also. They could not bear to see us upon their land; although we were there to defend it. And the more of us died—instead of themselves—the better they enjoyed it.

"I may be narrow-minded, and an unfair witness; but nine out of ten of us say the same. Many a time we longed for a good charge, into the centre of the Spanish army; if it deserved to be called an army. But we got to respect the French, and like them; they are not hidalgoes, but gentlemen; and every bit as brave as our own fellows. If they had been led, as well as we were, with one head present over them, instead of a lot of jealous marshals, countermarching one another, we should have had to embark in 1809: for we were not many, and the few we had were starved.

"However, I am rambling into big questions, instead of going through with my little one. When we retired, after Talavera, leaving our sick and wounded there, to the care of the Spaniards, who deserted them; nothing but a bold stroke on the part of our commander, and the remissness of Napoleon's puppet-king, preserved

us. Sir Arthur crossed the Tagus, just in time, by the bridge of Arzobispo; and then it became of vital import to seize the bridge of Almaraz, lower down; by which our retreat might be intercepted. To make sure of this momentous point, a force of light cavalry was sent in advance, with all possible despatch. And the first, to arrive at the bridge, were the same Hussars, of whom I spoke before; most dashing, impetuous, reckless fellows.

"The night was very sultry, and unusually dark, darker than I have ever known a summer night in England; and I suppose that is quite natural. We, the main body of the army, were eight, or ten miles, higher up the river, labouring along with the lame-horsed guns, and places where no horse could drag them up. Then the black night fell upon us; and we boiled our empty kettles. Men, who have marched far, with nothing in their stomachs, fall into a jog-trot sort of resignation, a weary trust in Providence, that having had the bad side, they ought to find the good one turning up. I remember the night quite well, because I had never been so lame in all my life; and I went down to the Tagus, where a little brook ran in, from a place they call the 'Meza

d'Ibor;' and though I could not spare the time to bathe, because somebody else would have gobbled up my supper, I soaked my hot feet in the cool mountain water, and from limping, was able to jump again. For all of us, officers as well as men, had taken a strong pull at the guns that day.

"I assure you that we were more full of fatigue, than of anything else, to sleep upon; for a quarter of a pound of unground wheat was all the bread we had for supper; and the meat was an ounce of goat's flesh. We were thankful, we enjoyed it, and we tried to spare some, for our friends with weaker appetites, who had taken the fever, or been wounded. But there was a heavy feeling in the air around us; and the night, that came over, seemed to lie upon our bodies, instead of drawing round us, like a curtain.

"The insects were enough to eat us up; the heavier the air is, the harder they do labour. There is a fearful creature there, with a saw in his head, like a prawn's; and in his tail, a gimblet, with a fir-cone structure to it. When a weary man is fast asleep, this fellow takes his stand, in some sensitive part of the system, where he can find a little eminence of the sur-

face, not far from an equal depression. Then he spreads his legs, like a painter's trestle, and works his head-saw through the hill before him, while he screws the cutting worm of his tail-gimblet, into the valley behind him. And the worst of it is, that you never can catch him.

"In spite of all our weariness, these, and other plagues, allowed us scarcely a good wink of sleep; and we distinctly heard trumpets, miles away, and the sound of small arms, carried to us, by the peculiar condition of the night, and the formation of the hills around us. We were puzzled; for we thought that the French could not be there; but none could ever say where the Spaniards might be; for their great delight was, to keep us in the dark about it.

"We marched very slowly, on the following day, down the left bank of the Tagus; the weather being most oppressive, the track very difficult, and our horses broken down. But when we arrived, on the evening after that, opposite the boat-bridge at Almaraz (which had been so important to us), we saw a very sad, and moving scene, which will never quit my memory. In a bend of the river, where the setting sun threw shadows, on the yellow

ground it had scorched up, a firing-party was taking position; and before them stood a British officer.

"I had never seen a thing of that kind yet; neither had those around me; but we knew, as if by instinct, what it was, and we drew aside, and trembled. The verdict of court-martial was being read aloud, and we heard the words—'cowardice, and treachery, in the presence of the enemy;' and the sentence—'death.'

"There stood a group of officers, illustrious now throughout Europe, as long as any history shall last; the commander-in-chief, looking stern as the rocks; and a part of the celebrated Light Division, drawn up like a wall, and as mute, and still. But the faces of many of the men were working; for they loved the man they were to slay.

"He stood calmly looking at them, as firm as I am now, and a great deal firmer; and he even seemed to smile, at such a fuss about his life. He was asked, if he had anything to say, and he said—'Nothing.' And then with a stately step he went, and took his place, where the distance had been measured, and stood with his hands at his side, his heels together, and his broad chest expanded, for the bullets. I saw him, with the

sunset on his face, and knew him—the man who had saved my life—the bravest man I had ever met with.

"The guns were levelled at him, he was opening his lips to say 'Fire!' as he had claimed the right to do,—when, swifter than a flash of steel, a man leaped before the muzzles, turned round, and cried—'Shoot me, shoot me! I did it all. He knew nothing of it. Shoot me; if you must shoot any one.'

"It was the mere click of a trigger, that both of them were not shot together. The general held his hand up; the men dropped their muskets; the two, in such peril, stood side by side, each challenging the death-shot. In a moment, it was known that they were brothers, and a buzz of wonder broke the awful silence. Before we could see any more of them, they were both under guard, by Sir Arthur's orders, for the further consideration of their case.

"Now the story is a strange one; yet not to be doubted, in the face of all the evidence. These two brothers were of very good birth, and a family, well-known in England. Well-known, not only for their property, and lineage, but also for their strong peculiarities. It was said, that they never thought, as other people

thought; and never even acted upon what they thought, as others would have done, who thought so. And this seems to have shown itself, in the actions of these two, which I have not been able at all to understand, up to the present moment. And my good friend, General Punk—though he will not confess it—is no wiser.

"However, I can tell you, that these two brothers, Philip, and Lewis, were in the same regiment of Hussars, attached to the Light Division, of which you have heard me speak before. A fashionable, and a proud regiment it was, famous for discipline, dash, and daring. Lewis, the younger brother, had been with it some time, and was exceedingly popular, both with the men and his brother-officers, though considered rather odd, and romantic in his views. He was given to roving among the woods, whenever he could get the opportunity, and was always collecting plants and mosses; which of course he had to leave behind him. His colonel had called him to order, once or twice, for habits rather unsoldier-like; but the knowledge of the country, which he obtained, had more than once proved useful; he brought many welcome contributions to the

mess, such as fish, fruit, truffles, &c.; and above all there was no calmer head, no stronger hand, no bolder heart than his, in the charge, the surprise, or the rally.

"The elder brother, Philip, had only joined quite lately, exchanging from some other regiment: and there had not been time, to know much about him yet; except that he was very different from his brother Lewis, in everything, except appearance. In person, the brothers resembled one another, like twins; though I believe, there were three or four years between them. But Lewis had been exposed to climate, and hardship; while his brother, the viscount —for he was that by courtesy—had been living at home, in luxury. But they were not like twins, in anything, except the outward form, I do believe. For instance, there was no especial love between them; they avoided one another, when they could well do so; and seemed to have widely different tastes.

"All this came out afterwards, as you must know; for no especial heed of them was taken, with so many great events around us. Neither would we have heard that much about them, except for the extraordinary upshot of the case. We had plenty of young noblemen, and

heirs to titles, headed off, like poppies, when the French struck straight. But the oddness of this thing, and the contradiction of opinion, made us notice it. And I tell you, Julia, that I was only too glad, to have been out of the way when it happened; because I should not have known what to say, if they had called upon me for evidence.

"The night had been very dark; all agreed to that; and we had found it so, a few leagues higher up the river. A very close, and heavy cloud, fell over all the land; without any mist or dew (which help to carry light, they say), and without a flash of lightning, to enliven it. Those Hussars, or rather a detachment of them, not more than a hundred and fifty sabres, under urgent orders of despatch, rode into the black pine-wood, between the mountains, and the river-bank. I was told by one of them (quite a boy, who died gallantly in action at the Coa, next year) that they could hardly see their hands, before their faces, in the depth of that pitchy pine-wood; and but for that officer, who seemed to know every stick of it, they never could have found their way to the rickety boat-bridge. There they dismounted, sent fifty of their number across, saw to their horses, and

sat down, by the black streak of the river, to their scanty, hot, dry rations.

"Now, hereupon hangs the whole gist of the question, so far as there can be any question, where a man not only pleads guilty, but is the absolute witness against himself. Did the younger brother, Lewis—who was the senior officer, you must understand, and in command of the detachment, with his elder brother under him—did he cross the boat-bridge, as he should have done—for the danger was upon the other side, if any—or did he, as he himself declared, send his brother across, and remain with the main body? The night was so dark, and the brothers so alike, in figure, stature, dress, walk, and gesture, that the story must be left between themselves.

"That night, the most marvellous disgrace that ever befell a fine regiment, befell those Hussars. They were terrified, where no fear was; they were stricken with a panic, they were scared of their lives, or rather of their wits; for they never thought twice of their lives in the matter, I do believe. At any rate, off they went, helter-skelter, with what the French call a *sauve qui peut*, every man jumping on the first horse he could catch, and

tearing away, as if the devil tore behind him.

"In the morning, the bridge was wide open for the French, and the still more important ford below; and if they only had Napoleon with them, or even Soult unthwarted, not a British soldier, who fought at Talavera, would have told the tale, except in a French prison. The two best troops of the best British horse, that ever struck stirrup, or drew sabre, were leagues away on the road to Deleytoza, and came back at noonday; with even their horses hanging their tails, like a dog to be thrashed.

"It is said, that in the blackest hour of that black night, when these brave men lay sleeping —except the outpost across the river—sleeping the heavy sleep of men deadly weary, and with nothing on their stomachs to make them dream, a fear came through the air around them, a shudder, without voice or sound, a terror of the spirit, and a trembling of the flesh.

"All at once, it seized them, asleep or waking, lying on their backs, or sitting up against a tree, thanking the Lord for being still alive, or swearing at the insects, for knowing it; whatever they were doing; whoever they were, howsoever they strove to

man themselves,—a black fear came into the marrow of their hearts; man breathed it into man, horse into horse; and not one of them stayed there, to cough, or to snort.

"Their friends, across the river, took the panic at a back-stroke. Like frogs on the leap, they sprang over the bridge, caught their horses, and clung to their necks, while they spurred them, anyhow, anywhere, anyway, to be out of that black devilish wood. Three, or four, were killed against the branches; the others caught the main lot, and added to their terror. Bridles were not dreamed of; all was spur, and lie-along; and horses' throats were knocked up by the heels of horses. 'The devil take the hindmost' was the only cue, among as brave a lot of men, as ever feared the Lord.

"One man alone remained behind; an officer, who had not shared the panic, but could no more stop it, in the dark, than you or I could make a rabid dog sit up, and beg. This was the officer, who had crossed the river; that is admitted beyond all doubt, and shown by a curious circumstance, which I shall remember by and by, perhaps. The brother in command (the senior in the regiment, though the younger

by birth) should have certainly done this; because that was the side where the attack would be. However it appears, from his own statement, that the elder brother, Philip, was the brave one. The younger brother was the cause of all the shame; which was clearly shown to have begun with the officer, who remained in command, on our own side of the Tagus.

"The rest of the story, my dear Julia, goes into a very few words; and I am sure, I owe you many thanks, for having listened to so long a tale, with so much patience. Our great commander, after sifting all the facts, so far as the hurry of the time permitted, referred the matter home; for the sentence of court-martial, confirmed by himself, could not be set aside lightly. Home influence was brought to bear, no doubt; for the father of the two young men stood high with the government, and had a special hold, it was said, upon His Royal Highness. How that may have been, I cannot say; but such things never seem to fail of their due weight. The upshot of it was that the 'Headlong Hussars,' (as we called them, until they redeemed their disgrace, by dying, almost to a man, in battle) lost both the

officers of that great night-scare. The younger was cashiered; and the elder threw up his commission, with applause, having acted nobly, and saved his poor brother, at the risk of his own life."

"But, Uncle John," cried Julia Touchwood, who had listened most attentively to that long story; "you know best, of course, because you were there, and saw it all; which makes all the difference; but for my part I see nothing wonderfully noble, in a man jumping suddenly before a lot of guns, to save his own brother from their contents. Why, I would have done as much as that, for Dicky. You may think I am boasting; and perhaps I am. But I feel sure, that I could do that much."

"So do I. I know you would," Colonel Westcombe answered quietly; "in moments of excitement, we think nothing of our lives. The noble action was not that. The nobility was, that a nobleman should take upon himself, for the sake of a younger brother, the shame of arrant cowardice, and treachery—for that was charged, and supposed to be proven—the ruin to his life, the contempt for ever, the scorn of his regiment, his relatives, and country. He was a man of the world; he knew it; he knew

that he would blast all his young life to the root; yet he faced it all—to save his brother."

"I should like to know something, as to what he had been;" said the sceptical Julia, as if to herself; "I mean, before he went out to Spain. Whether he had shown himself so very noble then; or whether he had been loose, and slippery. You knew, what his brother was; but nothing about him."

"But my dear child, these were the facts, according to his own confession of them. It is a maxim of law, which I have heard at petty sessions——"

"I don't care that," she answered, snapping her long, strong, tapering forefinger—"for the maxims of the laws, even of the Medes and Persians; which were the only laws worth having, because even bribery could not change them. My plan is, to judge people, by their nature; in accordance with their acts, and their characters, and looks. And I say that the man who had proved himself thoroughly brave, in a thousand perils, could not have run away, could never have given the shameful order to run away, and would have stuck to the bridge o boats for ever; till Spanish starvation made him drop between them."

"But suppose that he was bribed, my dear; or had some other crooked motive. Something of the sort seemed to be implied, in some side words, or——"

"Uncle John, I am quite ashamed of you. A man who saved your life, and stood to be shot at, as well as even you could do!"

"Well, it is mean, shabby, low, and nasty of my mind, to be crossed with such vile ideas. And it never could have happened to me, but for the quantity of the world, that I have seen."

CHAPTER VIII.

DULY EXECUTED.

At this very time, there was going on in London that sad, but inevitable work of nature, the death of an old, and once powerful man. A breath of great heat had gone into the town, crossing the Thames from light-soiled hills, and commons, where fern, and furze, were dead with fire. Great heat, and great cold, especially the latter, have to repeat their onset long, before they get into those brick and stone bowels; but once let them get in, and they have their revenge. There are forests, that no brief storm can enter. The still mass of air within them walls out momentary impact; but when it once yields to persistent pressure, the fury of the baffled wind is greater, than on the open plains outside. So now, in this great September heat, London was a living furnace. Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, accustomed to fine

country air, and even Mr. and Mrs. Snacks, and baby Snacks, lay prostrate.

At the great house, within the old ivied walls, a special batch of hot air settled down; so that the crusty bricks were like a baker's, the windows like oven-doors, the grass-plots cracked as wide as a frog-jump, and the elms crisped off, with leaves as brown as the wares of a London greengrocer. The people inside, with the usual urban wisdom, threw all the windows open, thus sucking in (to cool themselves) air thirty degrees hotter than that of the house. So that the big house, which might have stood a siege of a week's heat, with the port-holes down, was as hot, in a day, as the heat outside.

When this had gone on for three days, with a blazing sun, and hazy nights, that nursed the sun's work, till he came back; when every slate was like a fire-tile, and every window-sill a hearth-stone, and an egg might reasonably have been roasted on the wood-work of the frames, it happened that the last room in the house, that contained any cool air, lost it. This was the largest room of all, the ball-room of the younger days, now made into two, by a great black screen, for the sick lord to sit, and to sleep in. The door, a double one, with heavy

purple hangings, faced the head of the broad old staircase, which was made of chestnut wood, with steps of only two-inch rise; for the ancestors of our present builders considered ladies' ankles, and their lovers' tightened knees.

Now, in the depth of this hot dark night, when the doors were thrown open, with a needless weight to stop them, and not even a window-blind had the life to rustle, at the head of the stairs, a loud voice cried—"Lewis, Lewis, my son Lewis!"

The deep hollow sound, and the loneliness of it, frightened every weltering heart at first; and they whispered in the darkness—"it is no concern of mine." But the housekeeper, Mrs. Tubbs, to set a good example, ordered back her trembles, and came out. She was dressed very nicely—as she always liked to be—and had not even put her night-cap on, for bed was the hottest place of all (she said), but was dozing in a stamped leather chair, and dreaming, in her chintz "pegnor," of the absent Captain Tubbs. With as little fear as she could manage, this brave woman stole to the foot of the main staircase, by the light of the night-lamp burning in the hall. At the head of the stairs, she beheld a gaunt figure, wrapped in a

blue silk dressing gown, standing between two white marble statuettes. The effigies were of two boys, young boys: and the dying father, who had lost them both, was come to spend his last minutes there. The weak breath of his end was nigh; but his voice was clear, and his mind was keen, as in days of noblest arrogance. In the shadow of the images, he spread one withered hand to either, and lamented.

"One, through wild indulgence, gone; and one, through savage tyranny! Is there any one faithful to me? How can I expect it?"

Then he called, with the pain of great wrong in his heart—"Lewis, Lewis, my son Lewis! If I could see you, before I die!"

Meanwhile Mrs. Tubbs (who was growing rather stout, from dining every Sunday with her dear friend, Mrs. Snacks) was working her way up the big staircase; for his lordship's despair of any loyalty had touched her, as well as the sadness—so she told the undertaker—"of him having two himages of boys, not grown into any breeches yet; when he might have had two live officers, with as much gold lace as a footman; if it hadn't been for his own wickedness." Being a woman, she forgot every bit of his wickedness now, in his wretchedness.

"My lord," she said, approaching very carefully, because of the shadows, and of his condition; "you were asking for some one faithful to you. I have always been that; and have always borne the highest possible character, for honesty, integrity, industry, high principle, combined with an eagerness to oblige——"

"Then oblige me, by holding your tongue. Oh, Tubbs! Of course it is Tubbs. Tubbs, come in here."

"Your lordship looks very ill indeed," observed the lady, entering the large room, with some fear—for a pair of wax candles were but timid ghosts of light—"let me put on my bonnet, my lord,—I have no fear,—and run for Sir John, this moment."

"No, Tubbs; Sir John can do me no more good, nor harm. Thanks to the fishmonger, I am dying. He sent no ice. It was Gaston's place to see to it. He bribed him not to send it; I am quite sure of that. For he heard Sir John say, that heat would kill me. But I will floor him yet; if he will only keep away. Where is he? Does he know, that I am up and moving? He generally sticks to me, as tight as any horse-leech."

"He must have heard your lordship's call:

but you know what Mr. Gaston is, in a thunderstorm. And though I have not heard thunder yet, I saw a bright flash of lightning, just before your lordship shouted." Even as she spoke, a pale blue current flickered through the gloomy room.

"I did not call. I was talking to myself. Lightning again! If it would only last for two hours, I would fight off death."

Mrs. Tubbs started; for the flash was much nearer, and a long peal of thunder rumbled through the house. "That will drive him into the coal-cellar," she said; "he has no fear of God, or of Satan; but he can't abide a thunderstorm."

The old man trembling, (not with fear, but weakness,) went to the great coved window, facing to the south-east, whence the tempest was approaching. "The curtains are too heavy; draw them back; that I may see the night."

Following his steps, and order, the housekeeper drew the hangings back; but of the night there was nothing to be seen, except black distance. Then there came a lifting flash, that showed St. Paul's, and the two shot-towers, a far away flash upon the Kentish hills.

"Gaston is a coward," said the earl, as he fell

into a chair, and wiped his forehead; "the storm is twenty miles away as yet. Tubbs, are you afraid of summer lightning?"

"Not I, my lord. In the very worst of weather, I feels myself under the hand of the Lord. Mr. Gaston, you know, has been struck by lightning; and a burnt child——"

"Tubbs, you shall have a thousand pounds, if you fetch me a lawyer, while I sit here alive. Give me my elixir first. Double quantity—all in the bottle. When the cold comes, after the storm, I shall die."

As the housekeeper hurried down the stairs, she peeped into Mr. Gaston's room, which commanded the approach to the old earl's quarters, as well as a general survey of the basement. The red-faced man was not there; he had fled to the cellarage, under the pantries, and kitchen, as the surest refuge from the storm. Mrs. Tubbs turned her nose up; for she hated that man, if possible, more than she feared him; and then, with feminine insolence, she took his best umbrella from the stand, and quitted the premises by the little door, where poor Mrs. Snacks had been so unwell.

There was no rain yet; but flips of reflected lightning, here, there, and everywhere, shone

upon the roadway, or flickered at the corner, or flitted behind some big tree, or black house. Mrs. Tubbs went on bravely; of all the works of the Lord, she feared man only, finding him to be the only bad one. She said this to herself, to make the best of things—because there were no men about, but plenty of the higher works of Providence—as she hastened towards "Amalgamation Villa," the hospitable abode of Mr. Snacks.

That gentleman was up, and wide awake, carefully conning share-lists—for the weather was never too hot for that—and as soon as he had heard the tale, he went for his hat, a writing-case, and a double-barrelled pistol; which he loaded, and pocketed, without the knowledge of the ladies. "Now, we'll checkmate the red-faced man," he said to Mrs. Tubbs, as they set forth together; "no lawyer in the land can draw a better will than I can. Ha! here comes the rain, and in earnest too! Take my arm, madam; I will keep you dry."

The old house was shaken to its deep foundations, by the din of rolling thunder, and the long windows glared with the fire of the skies; but the old earl was sitting, with the leaded lattice open, cherishing the last

breath of above-ground air. The butler of the house, a very old dependent, had been sent up by the housekeeper, before she hurried forth. He was standing by the curtain now, overcome with want of courage, flinching from the lightning, and the tempest roar outside; flinching even worse, from that which he must soon look straight at—the growth of death before him; and still from habit, peering towards the staircase door, in fleshly dread of his bugbear, Mr. Gaston.

"Here I am, my lord," said Mr. Snacks, advancing boldly; "grieved to hear how much your lordship has suffered from the recent heat. At last the change has come; and I hope, it will benefit your lordship."

"That is no concern of yours. You are here to draw my will. To what firm do you belong?"

"The long-established firm, your lordship, of Snacks, Giblets, Tucker and Co. I am the senior partner, William Snacks, entirely at your service."

"If you were not respectable," said the earl, with his old keen look revived—for he did not like the style of man—"Tubbs would not have called you in. And if you can draw a

valid will, it does not matter who you are. Now put into legal form what I tell you. "I, Earl Delapole'—describing me aright—'leave all that I have to dispose of, to my only surviving son, Lewis Arthur, now Viscount Pole, for his absolute use, and I appoint him my sole executor, if he be surviving. But, if he be dead, I leave all the above to his children, if any; and if none, to the right heirs of my lands and titles; appointing in that case as my executor, Mr. Thomas Latimer, of the firm of Latimer and Emblin, who have long been my solicitors. For legacies, I leave £1,000 to Mrs. Tubbs, my housekeeper; to each of my domestic servants £50; and to my agent, George Gaston, the pair of felt slippers, which he stole from me, to come skulking about my door at night.' Be sure you put that in. Tell me, when you are ready."

Entering into the spirit of the man—hot and imperious to the last—Snacks, with his writing materials ready, called for a large supply of candles. For the play of lightning, round the house, and across the open windows, dimmed, and sometimes seemed to quench, the pale and feeble light inside. Then with a good many amplifications, and fine sweep of verbiage,

in the manner of the most accomplished lawyer —who after slaying his slain three times, drags him nine times round the walls—Mr. Snacks discharged his meaning, and comparatively that of the testator also.

"There is no time to waste in words; put it anyhow," said the earl, who knew much more of law than his new lawyer. "I have little to dispose of. The land is all secured. The chief thing is about executor. Gaston was that; but he won't be now. I feel better. It has done me good to discharge this bit of business. Snacks, you shall have fifty guineas —though you are no lawyer, any more than I am, and I remember something about you now—when you bring me a receipt for this concern, from Latimer and Emblin. They are to keep it dark, you know—not to write to me about it—only to see that it is valid, and give you a private receipt for it. Now let us have the witnesses. Tubbs is no good; Tubbs is a fat legatee—no allusion to your figure, loyal Tubbs. I am not going to die yet; don't you think it. I love the lightning; it has set me free. Be off, all of you, as soon as this is done with. I shall go to sleep, exactly as I am; give the Devil legal notice, that I don't intend to die."

His lordship was right. After duly executing this last will, and testament, he turned over in his chair; and his mind was so relieved, that he enjoyed a bowl of ox-tail soup, next morning.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ISLAND ROCKS

Brisk with air, and sparkling ways, and melodies of water, Island Glen, on a sunny day, is a place to sit in patiently. The river, breaking through a fissure of the hills, with two dark tors to guard it, divides among vast blocks of granite, into myriad gleam, and shade. Standing up in scores of tons, the granite scorns the water, as a thing that has come to cool its feet, and may dribble below its instep. The water, believing in its own business, and heedless of stony contempt, comes on, with a thousand checks; but at every check, scattering bright loquacity. The gravity of grey-bearded boulders only makes it leap the more, and spread in tumbling shelves around them, to meet again in some calm pool.

In spite of hard rocks, there is brushwood here, and even some leafy attempt of trees.

Dwarf oak, birch, and alder, nestle, below the brown ravage of the upland gales; with the kind encouragement of the stream, across whose spray they shed their own. And here, beside the white foam, glisten scarlet waves of mountain-ash, a companion cascade of coral.

Under the largest tree, that lapped the water, both with root and branch, Gruff Howell sat, with his long gun, waiting for young Squire Westcombe. He was thinking of his own sad plight, and the tangle he was stepping into, less through love of justice perhaps, than fear of sad injustice. For he knew, that not his licence only, but his liberty was imperilled, by the freedoms of the outlaws now assembling at the *Raven*. It behoved him, however, to be very wary, in his dealings with that crew; unless he were resigned (which as yet, he was not) to contribute, personally, to the nurture of the young birds on the ivied crag. Gruff was a resolute man, but owed his life to himself, and his native land.

These reflections had given him pause, and made him regret, in the clear sunlight, the gratitude of his moonlight mood. His life had been saved, by the courage of another; and he certainly had, for a limited period, felt a sort of

gratitude. This strange feeling—the rarest of all our sensations, and the most fugitive—was now beginning to be explained away, by the larger logic of the tranquil mind.

"He pulled me out of a bog, it is true; but why did he do it? Why, to please himself. Of course he got wet; but not half so wet as I was. It was a wonder that he hooked me; for he never ventured out of his own depth. And after all, I had better have gone down, than found things, as they were, when I got home. He did not even know who I was—pooh, pooh! One may make too much fuss of things. I am thankful, of course, and all that. But still, I am not going out of my way, about it. What I have to consider is, what will be most for my own good. And, unless I see my way to something, I am not going to put my life in danger. Anybody might have done it. I would have done it for him, and never mentioned it. Directly you come to look fairly at it, 'tis an accident, not an obligaton. It will be very nasty of him, if he thinks I owe him anything."

John Westcombe did not think, that Mr. Howell owed him anything. He was not come here, to obtain reward for his little service in

saving life; and he did not even expect to hear anything to care about. Having been asked to come, he came; for the place suited well with his land-falls; and he thought to hear some trifle, more to interest, than concern him. With his strong light step, he came across the rocks, balancing his gun upon his shoulder; while the lemon-coloured setter, having found a retired watering-place, lay down in it, and lapped; and with his ears adrip, cherished a pious, but futile hope, that his fleas would go floating down the river.

"I hope you are none the worse, for your wetting," said Westcombe, as soon as he descried the other man; "it was a long way to walk home, with wet clothes on."

"No, sir, I find myself all the better," the innkeeper answered, with a lift of finger half-way towards his cowskin cap; "I had got a bit of a cold coming on; but the peat-water seem to have took 'un away."

"I have heard of that, more than once. No doubt there is some good reason for it. The peat-water never is so cold as the river-water, I believe. But you asked me to come, about something."

"So I did, sir; so I did. But a ticklish

thing, for me to talk of, and requires understanding. Perhaps you have heard of Captain Larks, not far from where you pulled me out. He lies to the bottom of it. But least said, soonest mended. What concern to you or I, if they put a bullet into him?"

"It would be a very great concern to me, and to you too—I should hope—to dream of such an atrocious murder. Speak out, Howell. You had better tell me all."

"My own belief is," said Gruff, quite calmly; "that it isn't the captain they are after. What good could he be, to any of them? But I hear them say, that he hath a young daughter, a very fine-looking maid indeed; and betwixt you and I, sir, excusing my opinion, what they wants most is, to get hold of missy. However, I better say no more. Least said, soonest mended."

"You are wrong there;" said Jack, with his eyes so fierce, that Howell went further back under the tree. "Either you will tell me all you know, or I will pitch you from this rock into that black hole; and out you don't come again, my fine fellow. Tush for your gun—I will snap it in two."

He wrenched the man's gun from his hand, a

he spoke, and struck his knee under the breech, to snap it across the stock; but the man looked at him piteously, and did not move.

"Very well," said Westcombe; "I will spare it. I don't want to spoil a fine gun, if I can help it. But make up your mind, that I will stand no nonsense. I had no right to threaten your life, my man; and I am sorry that I did so, for it was a cowardly thing to do. But unless you carry out your promise, I will march you to my father's house; and to jail you go, as a thieves' accomplice. Make your choice, in one minute, Howell. I am not in a mood to be trifled with."

This was plain enough, without words; but the old man saw, that there was room for reason, as the young one recovered self-control.

"You can march me, wherever you please," he said, as if he must put up with tyranny; "because you are a young man, and I am an old one; and you are twice as big as me. But for all that, you don't get a word out of me; without it is by fair means, Squire Westcombe."

"I should like to know what you call 'fair means.' If you mean bribery, you shall have none. Though of course, your behaviour would be borne in mind, when the licensing question

arises. Else, you will have to quit for certain, as a notorious harbourer of thieves. Now make your choice in one minute, Griffith Howell."

"Well, sir, you leave little choice. But I care not much, what comes of it. Nothing but one thing makes me care to stick in that old rats' castle. One thing only; and I dare say, nothing will come of it, as usual."

"Tell me what it is; unless it is a secret." Westcombe looked at him with a kindly heart, for he saw by the glisten of the old man's eyes, that some tender feeling moved him.

"Nothing, sir. Only I was thinking of my son—a gadabout fellow, the same as I have been. But not a bad sort, Squire Westcombe. As fine a nature, as the Lord ever made."

"Let me know something about him;" said Jack, with no pursuit of his own ends; but because he had that gift of interest in other people's affairs, which made the colonel so popular.

"It is a long tale, sir; and a sad one. But a better soldier never lived, than my son Rees, in the Spanish country. He was in the light cavalry, five campaigns; and I followed the army as much for his sake, as to make my pickings out of it. Since the penny post came

in, they brought me a letter from him. And I been in hopes to see him ever since; and if I was driven out, from where I be, he might come, and he must go again."

"You shall not be driven out. I will take care of that," young Westcombe answered, as if he were the chairman of the quarter sessions; "all you have to do, my friend, is to tell me everything you know. Sooner or later, and perhaps very soon, a stop must be put to the lawless doings, that have been the disgrace of our neighbourhood. When you talk of danger to Captain Larks, and even to—to the members of his household, you must perceive that things are going much too far. Have you thrown in your lot, with such miscreants?"

"No, sir. But I have let them creep in round me, and order me out of my own house. There was only one at first; and he paid me fair, and came for his letters, and all that. There seemed to be no harm. It was no concern of mine, to know him from the man in the moon; and so long as he brought no others, I put up with it; though I guessed that he was a wild one. It was not my place to betray him, was it; though I guessed that he was a bad one?"

"Certainly not. You were quite right there.

As long as he behaved well on your premises, it was no concern of yours. You stood in the position of a host to him."

"So I did, sir; reasonably, and by sound interpretation. But when he began to make a feasting place of my poor inn, and bring stolen sheep there, and black sheep from the mines to eat them, it was a different pair of shoes. I found myself put against the law, and the law put against me, more and more. And when I was ordered about, like a slave, and had to be out of bed all night, and could not even get my money——"

"Ah, that was very bad indeed. The least they could do, was to pay upon the nail."

"That they did not, sir. And if I said a word, they would roast me, in front of my own joints—leastwise, what they makes me cook for them. It have come to such a pitch, that I can't abide it. Why, what do you think their last move is? The craze of the world is free-trade now; and free they make with my trade. Every one must have of me everything he likes, pretty much at his own figure; and then they come, and clear my till for me. They tell me that is the true free-trade. Squire, it is time to put a stop to it."

"It shall be stopped;" Jack Westcombe answered, stamping on the granite, as he spoke. "We hold a warrant now against one fellow. General Punk himself came with it; because there had been a good many before; but nothing was ever done with them. So my father locked it up, till needed; and the general has been ill ever since. You might as well throw it into the fire, as give it to the 'police,' to execute. But it is quite new, and it should do something. We have found out his right name at last—'Guy Wenlow;' they had it 'George' before."

"For sure now, that made it all wrong," said Howell, with a Welshman's nicety in law; "we call him 'the black gentleman;' for a gentleman he must have been, some day. You never saw any man so knowing of his vittles; which downright proves the gentleman. But who is to catch him, sir? I won't be party to it. Although he has carried on with me, too bad."

"Howell, I respect your feelings there. Treachery is of all things the lowest. You shall not be asked to do anything of that sort, upon your own premises. At the same time, you may, in all fairness, tell me what their

designs are upon Captain Larks. Otherwise, you become a party to them. How many of them are there?"

"Four, sir. All of them desperate men; enough to overpower any household. Every one of them carries his life in his hand; and little he seems to care for it. Wenlow, as you call him, is the master of them, and can handle them as he pleases. It is clear to my thinking, that he gets his orders from some one, who keeps out of sight—somebody with money, and some end to serve; or why should he deal with such a gang? Captain Larks is at the bottom of it; not to do things, but to be done by. Sir, do you know, what has crossed my mind? It was through my thinking of my son, that it came to me. From what I heard say, I made up my mind, to have a good look at that Captain Larks, without his knowing of it. And so I did. And if ever I saw a man well-known to me, in the times when the great fighting was, Captain Larks is the man, and no mistake."

"We have no business with what he used to do;" Jack answered quickly, in his loyalty to Rose; for he really feared, after many dark surmises, and hints from divers quarters, that

the father of his beloved had done something beyond inquiry; "the only question we have to deal with is—what do those fellows want with him?"

"Well, sir, that is more than I can say," replied the landlord of the *Raven*; "but something to do with the old thing, most likely. They watch him close enough; I can answer for that. They don't tell me, of course, what their orders are; but I hear them talk, more than they think of. I believe their orders are to shoot him outright, if he tries to go off suddenly. But if they get wind of his meaning to go, their plan is to carry off his daughter; that he may stay at home to look for her. Anyhow, he is not to go from home."

"Upon my word, a very pretty state of things!" Jack exclaimed so loudly, that the other put his hand up—"a gentleman is not to leave his own house, not to go about his own business even, without the permission of a lot of sheep-stealers! Howell, I don't believe a word of your nonsense."

"Well, sir, please yourself about all that. Only I have told you my opinion, at the risk of my life; and if you laugh at it, you can't well blame me afterwards. Squire, I wish you good afternoon."

"No, you shall not do anything of the sort. Here you are, and here you stop; until I have something settled with you. What good do you do me, by vague warnings? I want to know, how to stop such mischief, and to punish every mother's son of them. If a scoundrel was scheming against me, to suit his own rascally purposes, do you think I wouldn't have it out with him? And when [illegible] done against those that I love, am I likely to run away, and let them do it? Howell, I shall go with you, to your house."

Whatever his licence may be, no man desires to be consumed on his own premises.

"No, sir," said Howell; "it would make a great row; which is just the thing to be avoided. And what good could you do? You are strong enough, and brave enough to meet one man, I dare say. But here are four of them; and all with heavy fire-arms. You have saved my life, and I will not destroy yours; which would be done at once, if you ran in among them. The 'black gentleman' has a liking for your father—that I know, from many things—but it would not keep him from blowing out your brains, sir, if you tried to cross him. You must bear in mind, how long he has lived out of

doors; and that makes men think much less of life. I have been out of doors myself, for months together; and life becomes a puff of air, among such people."

"What you say is sensible. And I have no right to bring you into danger. You have acted fairly, and kindly by me; and you shall have no reason to regret it. But the worst of it is, that I don't see what to do. I am nothing of a hand at scheming. Tell me how to stop it, and it shall be done. My plan is to collar the ringleader, to lay Wenlow by the heels in jail."

"Not at my house, sir," Howell answered; "not at my house, whatever you do. There is no house within three miles of mine. I should be murdered if you tried to do it there. But have him in his own place, if you can. No pack of hounds can come nigh an old tor-fox; and no regiment could catch Bog-Wenlow."

"Rubbish! I should only like to join hands with a certain friend of mine, who knows that fellow; and within a week we'd have him fast enough. I don't know him by sight; or I would have a shy at him immediately. He shifts about, here and there, and everywhere, they say; according to the weather, and his

wants, or whims; but Cranmere is his head-quarters, I believe; and I know Cranmere, as well as any one can know it. I have been there, several times, to look for him."

"So you might, sir, fifty times; and he be there all the time, without your twigging him. I can give you a case, of what I know to be a fact. He laid a guinea each, with them other three chaps, that they would not find him there, if they searched all day; and he gave his honour to go on as usual, cook his dinner, smoke his pipe, sit out in the sun—if there would be any—and go on like a common turf-cutter. Well, sir, they hunted all day, and they vowed that there could not be a snipe there, out of mark, and that he was a liar; and they were blessed, if they would pay,—when sudden there he was, in the middle of them, with one of them new-fangled pipes in his mouth, that are made of the froth of the sea, by all account. He had been there, all day, looking at them sometimes; sometimes not concerned to do it."

"I don't believe a rap of all that story," said Jack, who was hardened into disbelief, at Oxford; "I don't mean to say that you exaggerate at all. You believe it, no doubt, because

you heard them tell it. And perhaps they believed it. But I don't. Unless the day was full of thick fog; and of that there has not been much, you know, for a most unusual time. The springs are very low; the bogs are down. Cranmere is only three or four miles from here. Howell, make your mind at ease. I shall have that fellow, in a day or two. And of course, I shall hold you clear of it. Nobody shall know, that I have even seen you."

"If I may ask you a favour, sir, it would be to leave it, till my son comes home. Rees is the bravest man, that ever stepped the earth, and might have been an officer, except for being bashful. He knows all the ins, and outs, of half the bogs on Dartmoor; and the turn of his mind is, to catch the proper end of things. Not to go dwelling on this side-stroke, or on that; but to lay hold on the core of it, and pull it up to daylight. Ah, if he had only been born, when I was, he would have stood next to the duke, by now."

"Then I wish, with all my heart, that he was here," said Jack, whose forehead was wrinkled with a world of doubts; "my father has been a great officer, but he waits for authority always."

"So he ought, sir; so he ought; and I beg you to do the same, Squire Westcombe, concerning of my poor premises. I have put myself straight anyhow, with you, sir."

"Yes, to a certain extent, you have. I shall take my own course; but I will keep you clear of trouble. You want to be off. Good-bye, my friend! Let me know at once, if your son comes home. But don't expect me to wait for him. I shall keep a very sharp look-out, and strike, if I get the opportunity."

CHAPTER X.

TWO PROUD MEN

In spite of all these turmoils on its banks, the Christow went on well, although the summer was so dry, and long. For this water came from a noble depth of bog, purely inexhaustible; and the bell-ropes of the church, with three men upon a plank, had failed to give sign of its having any bottom. And not only so, but if anything happened, to choke the gullet of that bog, this fortunate brook possessed at least a dozen little pitchers, bedded in the hill-side, and with crystal radiance brimmed. Each had a very small supply to start with; and a stone could overwhelm, or a turf of dried peat sponge it up; but after a little run, they ran faster, and rejoicing leaped into one another's bosoms.

Therefore, there still was green sward here, and green bushes waving off all dreams of autumn, in the captain's garden, where the sun

was mild. Refreshing sounds arose, through the brushwood overhanging; and the play of light was pleasant, in the channel of the shadows. But what heed do men pay, to such trifles; when their minds are working, and their hearts are up?

Two proud men stood, facing one another, on the quiet grass bank here, beside the little river. Not proud unjustly, neither manifesting pride, nor even conscious of it; though its power underlay every tone of their voices, and turn of their thoughts. In little things, there could have been no humbler men, none more gentle, slow to anger, mild, and quiet-hearted.

"Am I to understand, once for all," asked Colonel Westcombe, looking firmly at the other, whose eyes met his, with equal firmness; "that you refuse me any kind of explanation?"

"Beyond any doubt, you must understand it so. I am sorry that it is so. But so it is; and must be."

"Have you considered, that it is not only your own question, but also that of others? That this set obstinacy wrecks the prospects of one, who is dearer to you than yourself? I mean not only as concerns my son—though he loves her dearly, and would have made her

happy—but also concerning all her chance of settling, in her own rank of life, with a man she could respect?"

"All that I have thought of, not only now, but for years; and it grieves me deeply; but it does not alter my resolve."

"You admit, that you could clear yourself, if you chose," the colonel's glance was very keen, and almost stern; "you admit that a word from you is the only thing needed, to make your daughter happy, with us or elsewhere; as well as to set yourself right with the world? And yet, from some miserable pride, you refuse it!"

"I have not admitted anything of the kind. You have put your own construction upon the case. And it is not for you, to talk of pride."

"I see what you mean. You have rebuked me there. But only from the most romantic point of view. Can you expect me to look over the position, in which you choose to stand?"

"No, Colonel Westcombe, I do not," Mr. Arthur answered calmly; "neither would I let you do so, if you wished it. The remedy is simple—have nothing more to say to us."

"And you can put it all aside, like that? As if you had no flesh, or blood, in you!"

"What else can you expect? It is the manner of the world—the world you belong to, and which governs now your actions. You scorn me, because I despise its opinions. You must act by its judgment. I act by my own."

"I can believe of you," Colonel Westcombe answered, with a gaze of deep astonishment, "anything, and everything, when you talk thus. There is nothing that such a man may not do; because he is his own standard. But there never yet was any one, so wise, and grand, as to measure himself aright, by his own measure."

"That is the last thing, I would desire to do. I prize the good opinion of all good men—and especially yours, Colonel Westcombe."

Mr. Arthur bowed, to end the conversation thus. But the colonel, who was looking rather harshly at him, because he thought him arrogant, caught a gleam in his eyes, that changed the tone of thought, and feeling, towards him.

"My dear fellow, we have stood together, with our lives upon the wind; and caring for them, as little as for the wind itself. In deadly peril, you saved my life. But for your wonderful courage, I could not be here now, to speak to

you. I hope that I never was a coward; but I could better believe it of myself, than of you. I beg you, as one who could love you as a brother —drop this dark mystery between us. If you forgot yourself once, confess it bravely. There are moments, when none of us know what we do. Only scatter that horrible charge of treachery, which was imported into your sad business—and I will face the world about it, side by side with you; and your Rose, and my Jack, shall be happy together. Pole, as a dear friend, I take your hand, and ask a favour."

Then the pride of the other man was beaten, by this large humility; and the cold decision of his gaze was lost. Conquered by the kindness of this old friend—the man of integrity, unspotted honour, wide fame, and large benevolence, he bowed his head, and said—"Give me one month longer. One month more, is all I ask. And surely your son, hot and hasty as he is, will be able to endure one month of doubt."

"Jack is a hot-headed fellow," said the colonel, smiling, as he always did, when he had to say anything about his son; "a month to Jack, is as much as a twelvemonth to us, who know how time goes. But, upon the whole, he has behaved most wonderfully well, throughout

these proceedings. You scarcely seem to understand my son; but at least, you will do him justice there."

"Gladly I will," answered Mr. Arthur; "I have been rough to him, once or twice; as much for your sake, as my own. Because I knew, how you would be vexed about this. But I will own to you, that if I had the choice of the world for my son-in-law, I would choose your son."

"Nobly said, most nobly said!" cried the colonel, with great warmth seizing the hand of the captain, and getting a good grip from it; "and I will tell you, my dear fellow, that though I have seen very little of your Rose, I love her, as I would love a daughter of my own. You may think me very hasty, and very sentimental. And it is not for me to say otherwise. But my judgment is considered, by good judges, to be very sound, and slow. May I tell Jack, what you have said about him? He is slightly depressed, and rather melancholy. Perhaps you have found me harsh, through that. But what you have said of him will set him up again."

"Certainly, tell him. I owe him great amends. I was very short with him, when I

caught him going on—you understand; as we might have done, in our young days."

"Yes, yes. True enough, we never make allowances. We are bound to keep them down; we must scold and snub them. But when we come to think of it, we begin to feel, that we ought to have remembered, what we used to do. What a pair they will make; if the Lord allows it! They seem to have been cut out, for one another. But we won't tell them that, till it comes to smooth sailing. They shan't see each other for a month; that is certain. At any rate, not with our approbation. Jack is under excellent discipline—Punk observed it, with great admiration—though, now and then, he gets over me; and he can manage his mother, more than I can. However, we will put him upon his honour. He never fails of that—as you know."

"Well," replied the captain, with a twinkle in his eyes; "he would not be like his father, if he ever failed in that. And he is like his father; and that set me in his favour, the first time he came to catch my fish."

"Aha!" exclaimed the colonel, to whom a very obvious joke was none the less attractive; "and he has caught your fish, your pet of all

fishes. But he has not quite landed ner yet. Time will show. But let us have patience. I am satisfied to leave it so. How glad I am, that I came to see you, at last! It makes things so much more comfortable."

CHAPTER XI.

SMINTHEUS.

SATURDAY, in its proper course comes round, bringing to school-boys half-holiday (ennobled by a lie-abed to-morrow), to working men wages, and intellectual delights, to women a zeal to go marketing, and an emulous desire, not to cheat, but only to get the right side of their little bargains (for the pleasure of proving their wit, by its fruits), and to gentlemen in general, and ladies ornamental, a Christian gratitude, that the week is over.

This was the large way, in which the flight of time was regarded from the heights of Touchwood Park. Not that there was any pride, in any bosom there. Lady Touchwood was sure, that instead of going up, she was come down, more than she could describe, from what her ideas used to be. At one time, she expected to

[redacted]n the House of Lords; and nothing but the [redacted] in which Sir Joseph would insist upon [redacted]eing his money come back again, had stopped [redacted]er from being there, at the coronation. But the only way to get up there, was to be in London, and to give parties to the Royal Family, and people on the stairs, especially Prime Ministers; and Sir Joseph could afford it as easy as a glove; but he stuck to his money, and he stuck to the dirt. However, she was happier, as she was. Though it had been said in Plymouth, that she was born, to adorn the most exalted rank.

Miss Touchwood thought that the people in London were probably quite as big fools, as those in Devonshire. But every young lady, in her position, had a right to go, and see what the others were about; and it seemed to her very stingy of her father, to be giving trumpery gipsy-parties; when he ought to have taken them all to town, before the season was over. For her part, she was tired of this neighbourhood. Nobody seemed to understand her. If she quoted a line of Byron, people thought it came out of a valentine, and asked her confidentially, who had sent it; and even a French, or German proverb, was supposed to come out

of a cookery-book. In a word, there was one to associate with.

Her brother, Squire Dicky, took a different view of things. He detested clever girls, who could quote his head off, and were shocked at the idea of having beer for breakfast. He had seen enough already of society, for him; and in his veteran opinion, it was humbug. He had never known more than one girl, worth the end of a cigar—and that one had sacked him. Or at any rate, her dad had done it; and he knew she was too good for him. But he was blest, if he was going to be miserable. The time for popping at the birds was come. He would send for the finest fellow he had ever known, who had promised to be with him in September; and then there was nothing he would wish for, better than to catch that stuck-up Westcombe poaching.

Accordingly he sent for Alec Howe of Trinity, a young man of great bulk, and stature; who was happy all day with him, but wretched in the evening, when the time came for swallow-tails, and white choker. Miss Touchwood enjoyed this young visitor, with prolonged delicious cruelty. He was as shy as any youth can be, who has never met a clever and accomplished

[redacted]; and has to do the graceful to her, at a table, [redacted]e everything is beyond his understanding. [redacted]ia, being in a very spiteful mood just now, from a variety of causes, missed not a single opportunity of deepening, and barbing, his bashful embarrassment. Beneath her clear gaze, his great hand shook, and his big lips opened, and closed, in silence; and nearly as much of his sillery, or hock, passed outside, as inside his throat. And yet he was a gentleman by birth, and of cleaner descent than his fair tormenter; only not familiar with wealthy ways.

Now this young man, and his host, the noble Dicky, were come home from a long day's shooting, that second Saturday in September. They had done well; for Howe was a fine shot; and Dicky pretty good, if he began well; though when he began ill, he would shoot amiss all day. That day he began well (by shooting a cat, who was hunting young rabbits, in a turnip-field), and he had gone on well, killing two birds out of three, which is not bad work for a Cambridge man. Also they had shot a hawk, and two whimbrels, three or four landrails, and some hares, and coneys, making altogether a nice mixed bag, which they spread out on the capping of a low curved wall, where the road to

the stables, and the kitchen-parts, divided. [redacted] was Dicky Touchwood's beloved camping-[redacted] commanding easy access, both [redacted] women, and allowing him to get into the view of either; or upon occasion to mediate between them. And to say, that the servants always liked him to be there, proves that he was a very honourable youth.

When Dicky, and his friend and hero, Alec, had spread out their game, to the utmost advantage, and stroked and felt everything, as if the defunction of its virtue went into the slayer—as the Norsemen, and Red Indians believed—they spread out their own noble bodies on the handy, or rather perhaps legsome, height of the low wall. Howe, being six feet and a quarter high, found the wall rather too low for him; but Dicky had his legs hanging above ground and his neat heels drumming. The head game-keeper, with his honest bluffness, stood a little way off, looking affable, for the young gents had not hurt his feelings much that day; and admiring stablemen, in their shirt-sleeves, approached, with a venerating hope of beer.

"How do you feel, Alec?" asked the lightsome Dicky; "I am as dry, as a hard-roed red

ing. What do you vote for, champagne, vipes? There's a first-rate 36 of Burton, t o[illegible]"

"I go in for that;" answered Howe, in whose mind, champagne was now sadly associated with the very dry sparkle of Julia.

"So do I, with all my heart. But the deuce of it is, that I have found a key working the old governor's best lock, where he keeps some stuff, that he thinks no end of. And I feel, that I shall have earned no ease of mind, until I have had a good peg at it. Tell you what I'll do, to make it square. We'll enjoy the swipes; and these chaps shall have champagne."

"Don't be such a fool;" said Alec Howe. Although he had not yet seen Sir Joseph, he guessed, from many sources, what he was like. But Dicky was off, to carry out his new idea.

"Why shouldn't they have what they like?" he inquired, coming back, with young Solomon behind him, whose face was in a bubble of anticipation; "now this boy pours out lashings of wine perpetually; yet he never tastes it, except when he licks the glasses. Sol, my lad, you shall have first bumper. See your father draw the corks for you. Why, your name is

Cork—you are the son of a cork. Now see, I I send you up into the liquid sky!"

Of the loftier humanities fostered at Cambridge, a main one was the art of discharging a cork full bang, from a bottle of poppish fluid, without loss. The process requires some experience, and quickness; but Dicky was a Master of Arts therein. He took a long pull at the pewter of ale, looking towards Alec, and in three half minutes, had three bottles of his father's most choice comet vintage "on tap," (as he termed it) for the brave stablemen. The keeper stood aloof, and would not touch it.

Suddenly, in the very midst of them, stood the master of the place, Sir Joseph Touchwood, cold, and pale, with quiet rage. With a sweep of his hand, he struck over all the bottles, then emptied the can of ale upon his son's head, and without a word to any one, strode off to the front door.

"My criky, we are in for it!" the poor boy spluttered, through the deluge of beer, which had checked his breath; "I never saw the governor in such a way before. But don't you be frightened, my good fellows. I will take all the row. You needn't turn a hair. And you shall have your three bottles, if I have

[redacted]uy them. What an extravagant old cove [redacted]"

Calling his friend, Alec Howe, who was trying to smile at this great outbreak, the heir of the Touchwoods went in, with all the dignity he could compass, by the kitchen door, made Alec pump over him, at a servant's sink, and then hurried up, to his dressing-room. He strove to be wrathful, but fear was foremost; and his teeth chattered sadly, as he got into his bath. He would have given all his ready cash—which he kept low,—for a little private talk with his dear mother. But her ladyship was dressing, and he got no chance of sending a message to her.

Very soon, he was trying to compose his mind, by smoothing the pile of a velvet waistcoat—for which he owed £3 10*s.* in Cambridge, and admiring in the glass the gentle dawn of reddish whiskers, brightened and strengthened, as examination showed, by the rich shower of fine-bodied ale. "I will rub them with the very best Bass, every day, and perhaps then Rose will like me," he was saying to himself, when a knock at the door made him jump, and a little note came under it. Running to the door, he called out, "Judy, Judy dear, darling

Judy!" for he knew the sound of her light step; "Julia, I want you desperately." But either she could not, or she would not hear; and the whisk of her dress was a memory round the corner.

"I shall have to do it all, by myself," he groaned, for he guessed too well what the letter was; "in for a penny, in for a pound. At any rate, the relieving officer shall know what I think of him. Halloa!"

The relieving officer,—as the male parent was called in those days, at our great universities,—had set down these few words, for his study. "Richard, as there will be no dinner to-day, I shall be glad to see you, in the dining-room, five minutes from receipt of this. (Signed) Joseph Touchwood."

"What a kettle of fish! Don't you wish you may catch it? I'll have a bar-out. The stable-cads shall supply me with grub, through the windows. But the governor would cut it, with a demon-laugh, and leave a brace of dog-berries to run me in. I will quit me, like a man. I'll go down, and have it out. 'Never say die,' is the ticket for soup."

When the young man appeared, in the barren dining-room, he saw his father sitting in the

six-legged chair, too deep in thought, even to look at him. His face was very stern, but with trouble, more than anger; and Dicky saw, that larger things than his, had gone amiss. He began to say jauntily—"Why, where's the dinner?" which was a serious concern to him. But his father made no answer; so he stood, and waited.

"Who is there? Oh, Richard, is it? Boy, stand, and look at me. I am not going to talk to you, about my affairs; but simply to explain, what yours will be. Hitherto, you have led a life of idle pleasure. Henceforth you will have to earn your own bread. Before I was half your age, I was doing that. It will make a man of you. How do you like the thought of it?"

"Not—not at all, sir. In fact I could not do it. I have never been accustomed to such treatment."

"Very well. You need not begin, till Monday. To-morrow, you will get your clothes together, and live at my expense, as usual. On Monday morning, you will shoulder what you want for immediate use, and be off at six o'clock, for the office of Mr. Growgray at Stonehouse. Mr. Growgray is a well-known dry-

salter; and, through my connection with him, he has promised most kindly, to find an opening for you. I have paid a considerable premium to him, and your salary will be a pound a week —a great deal more, I fear, than you will be worth, for a very long time, at any rate. Your stock of clothes will last you, for at least two years; and I shall endeavour to allow you five shillings a week, for pocket-money. Also, you will be allowed to come, and see your mother, and your sister (wherever they may be) one Sunday in every three months."

"It is quite impossible that you can be in earnest. Sir, you must either be——"

"No, I am neither mad, nor intoxicated; nor even hasty in this arrangement. It has been thought of for some months; while you were busy with your rats, and rabbits. Nature has made you a fool; and circumstances have concurred with nature. You are now provided with a good start in life. Fools always prosper the best, in the end. I have often heard you boast, that almost everybody likes you. That lays the foundation of a large sound trade."

"But I can't be a dry-salter, and I won't be a dry-salter, and I never could put up with the smell of it," Squire Dicky declared, as he fell

into a very luxurious chair, and embraced it. "Why, I should have to sit upon a three-leg'd stool!

"No; you might stand all day, if you preferred it. However, that is all the choice before you. Now leave me; I have more important things, to think of."

Dicky Touchwood was quick of thought about himself; but even on that subject now, his readiness was gone; so sudden was this outrage, and so overwhelming. He arose, without looking at his father, and made off; but his spirit came back, when he got to the door. "Sir, you will be sorry for attempting this," he said, with his voice half-choked by indignant tears; "I have plenty of good friends, who will stand by me. I will not go near any vile dry-salter. If you turn me out of doors, I will get an honest living as a rat-catcher, and contract for all the rats at Plymouth."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MUZZLE MUZZLED.

DARTMOOR, many-fountained Dartmoor, mother of a myriad streams, and wet nurse of a million mists, is not often scrimped with drought; but when the drought once gets established, how it smites the rocky land! Furze, and heath, dwarf rush, and bracken, even the cotton-grass of the swamp, and sedge that lines the tinkling rill, fade into one dreary yellow, or dingy red, that jades the sight. The power of the dry sun is reflected from the stark rocks, down the vales, and nothing is hidden from the heat thereof.

When such seasons come, they are so far asunder (in the hills, and valleys, of the distant years) that nobody remembers that they ever came before. And with one accord the people there, not being used (like brick-bound townsmen) to an unventilated oven, begin to make sad complaint, and outcry; which add ten per cent. to their temperature. Then they fan

themselves with their husband's hats—as many as have got husbands—and they feel that they owe it for a duty to the world, not to be over-charitable. In fact, they are cross, and they make the worst of everything, in the spirit of the flies that enter into their weak places.

Even at Christowell (cool and crystal, at least in pretty places, with the import of the brook), dryness of the ground, and of the skin, began to tell upon the children, and the women, and the men. Not one of them all had the least idea, that it made any difference to her, or to him; but every one had a very large perception, that no one else was, as he ought to be. Horse-flies began to descend upon mankind, in lack of their nobler nurture, spotted flies, with broad heads and big tweezers; and wherever there was moisture for a gnat to nip, he nipped, and was exceeding thirsty.

But, if in the valley, where the grass still grew, and the leaves still cherished the nursing of the brook, nature was depressed, and her mighty masters petulant; how much worse must the pest of season be, on the brown, unshadowed, and unwarded crags! And worst of all round the dry desert of the *Raven*; where mine-slag, sparry rocks, and spelter dust combined, to glare

with intense heat, and cast it all around. All around was heat, and drought, dull tremor of the air, and pulse of haze, that twinkles when the dews of night are drained. Even the moormen would not come, to get their usual pint of ale, sadly although they needed it, for fear of the fury of the vipers round it, and the sun-death in the glare of rock.

However, the house, with its thick granite walls, and stone-floors watered from the well, was fresh with cooling shade inside, and the glisten of cool tankards. "Gentleman Wenlow" —as he now was called, from the dinners he had given there—sat without reproach, in a cambric-bosomed shirt (kindly borrowed from Parson Short), and considered the business that lay before him. The heat of the weather had stopped his parties, for the moment, because no meat would keep, and his guests declined to face the yellow distance, from their greener glens. Upon the whole indeed, this gentleman was not much displeased with that. It was quite as well to intermit the duties of a host, while this roasting weather held; and to steal sheep enough for his own consumption, was as much as an active man could do.

Therefore it was not social need, or sense

of solitude, that made him frown, as he sat with his cooling pot, of cider, rum, and borage, thinking how to carry out the orders of his patron. These were easy enough to understand, but not quite so easy to execute; even with the aid of the blackest boon companions. And the matter, from a moral point of view, was not altogether to his liking. For a long time now, he had been compelled to appropriate alien property. But he had striven to do this with a lenient hand, and a fine regard for justice, robbing only those who could afford it, and robbing even them at honest intervals, impartially. All his laxities were of necessity, all his lapses caused by largeness. What man has any right to own the earth, with a hundred better people born upon it, every minute? And if he cannot own the earth, as the whole includes the parts, how can he own any part of it? How much less then, can he be the owner of the things that move about on it, and have got four legs; while he, who lays claim to them, has only got two! Such reasoning is unanswerable; or if it can be answered, the best of the argument is with him, who has had the dinner, and digested it.

But what Guy Wenlow did not like, and in

spite of his reputation, found to be outside his province, was the commission of downright murder, in cold blood, and with no excuse. Captain Lark's had never harmed him, whereas George Gaston had been his ruin. With pleasure would he have shot the latter, in conflict, or upon insult; whereas now the relentless force of facts was driving him, too surely, towards the necessity of shooting the other. His orders newly received were brief, sadly to the point, and stringent—"It is too late for weak measures now. To carry off the girl is useless. If she leaves home, you shall swing for it. I am not like the fools round Dartmoor. Make a short job of it, for your own sake. With management, there can be no risk. Trust to me, for your escape, and a better land to winter in, with plenty of cash, and no more skulking. Let me hear of no more delay. If I have to come down, it will be the worse for you. I am watching you; and you have no escape, from me, or without me. Turn upon me, if you dare. Obey me, and you shall be free, rich, and happy."

The writer had taken good care, that none should identify his writing. It was hopeless, for a poor felon to denounce, or even break with

him. The tempter had not allowed him funds, to attempt to escape across the sea; and Wenlow even began to suspect, that Howell was bribed against him. His only chance lay in obedience to the deeper, and wealthier scoundrel. His own life was set against that of another; and he must not indulge in scruples. It would be a very easy business, to dispose of Captain Larks. Through many a flying visit, and many a lair among the bushes, he knew the ins, and outs, and rounds, among beloved plants and trees, of that too sanguine gardener. And his favourite double-barrel'd gun would carry a ball, as true as any rifle, and was certain for a rabbit at a hundred yards. At six o'clock, on this evening of the week, the captain was sure to be in his little vineyard, sitting on a pot, with his deep-bowled meerschaum, and presenting the very finest target for a shot. What right had any man to be so happy, and go on, as if the world was made for him?

With a frown, to confirm his resolution, he gulped the contents of his tankard; and then it occurred to him, that nothing could be easier than to secure proofs of *alibi*, in case of the worst coming to the worst, and a charge being made against him. He knew that Gruff Howell

was not at home; but his wife was there, and would do much better. Accordingly, when everything was ready, and a bullet dropped into either barrel of his gun, he unlocked his door, and went downstairs, in his shirt-sleeves, yawning heavily. Mrs. Howell was sitting in the bar, half asleep, with her spectacles by her, and the big bible open, at her favourite story of Joseph and his brethren, which she read daily, because it reminded her hopefully of her absent son.

"Fill this again for me, mother," said the guest, setting down his empty tankard. "What o'clock is it? Why, a quarter past four! Are you sure your clock is right?"

"Yes, sir. Or if anything, he be a little slow. We timed 'un by the baker's watch, only yesterday; and he brought the time from Bovey tower."

"Very well. Then I shall go to sleep again. This hot weather takes all the life out of me. I am not to be disturbed, mind. I want sleep. Only when the rabbits come, I may fire a shot at them. Don't be alarmed, if you hear my gun, about six o'clock, or so. No supper, till I call for it."

Receiving his tankard, with another stretch

and yawn, he went back to his room, and locked the door. Then he laid his other gun, which had once been Mr. Short's, upon the broad oak window-sill, with the lattice thrown back, and the muzzle outside, pointing towards the cliff, where the rabbits came to play, in the late afternoon, when the inn was quiet. He had shot two or three of them, before this, from the window; and now he fitted that into his deadly scheme. He corded the gun against recoil, and set a slow fuse of hemp to the touch-hole, which would smoulder for an hour, or perhaps more; and then he descended from the window, by a method which he had devised against attack. There was nobody to see him; all the brown moor was void, with loneliness, and lassitude; not a shadow, except his own, moved faster than the sun directed it. But he, at a pace it would make a languid man perspire to look at, scoured the hollows of the sun-burnt hills, to the far outskirt of Christowell.

Why make we light of our parents' wisdom, why imagine so vain a thing, as that they had no eyes to see, ears to hear, or tongues to taste? Denying them every other merit, we must admit, that they knew what was good to eat, far better than we do. Would they have given

as much for American flour, as for English? Would they have made their bread, with German paste, instead of brewer's yeast? Would they have bought fish, three weeks iced, and wine made where no grape gets ripe? And of the grape, and other fruit, would they have grown it for show, or for savour? Already in 1840, the rage for the pride of the eyes, and the pang of the belly, was making way among superior circles; and the ladies began to say, to one another—"if you can save my pine-apple from being cut, dear, I will lend it to you, for your dinner, on Wednesday."

But Captain Larks was happy still, in tending the good gifts of the earth, for graceful, and for grateful use. He sat upon his pot, and smoked his pipe, and working gently all the while, enjoyed the view of his own things first, and over, or between them, of the things beyond. For the wisdom of the quiet life was his—first to consider one's own affairs, without any wrath of anxiety; and then through their leisure, or over their ease, to enjoy a large view of the neighbours'. Thus was he behaving, in his vineyard, as soon as the heat of the sun declined, and the shade of the high parts cooled the rest, and the birds by the brook began

to sing again, and the trees freshened up from the drooping of the day.

Sloping down the hillside now, the light was tempered variously, with narrow flush, broad hovering patch, and faint fringe of suffusive haze. But in bold relief, sat the gallant captain, moving both arms briskly, with his broad chest prominent between his braces, and a smile of pride upon his tranquil face. For here were his grapes, swelling off from stoning, clustering richly below their leaves, sheltered from brunt of the day, and expecting the bloom of dew, to crisp their stalks. Some were clouding with soft blue tissue of the promised purple, some were pearly with pellucid white, others traced with stippled veins of tints that would be amber; while the rest were scarce emerging from pubescent green and gray. The gardener felt his heart maturing, with good will, towards God, and man.

"Impossible to miss him now. I can perceive the buttons of his shirt, and the beating of his heart. With this rest for my gun, I can hit him, to a square inch anywhere. He shall not even know, that he has been shot. I will give him a minute, just to finish up his pipe; and then off he goes to a far superior world."

With these thoughts, Wenlow, having dead point-blank at the self-congratulating Captain Larks, suspended his pull upon the trigger; not from mercy, but that delicacy of feeling which a man has, a smoking man, for a fellow-smoker's pipe—a feeling, whose depth is in nature's bowels, deep as the founts of calm volcanoes.

Presently the captain put his pipe down, being come duly to the end of it; and the man in the valley laid his eyes between the gun-cocks, to renew true aim at him. True enough it was, and too sure would have been the vine-dresser's fate, as regards this world—when a shadow fell across, in front of him, and before him stood his daughter Rose. Wenlow drew back his fore-finger from the trigger; he could not shoot the father, in the presence of the child. "I will wait, and see how they go on," he thought; "to save my own life, I could not take his, thus." He withdrew the muzzle softly, and in the deep shade, listened.

"Father, my mind is made up," said Rose, as she threw her arms round the captain's neck, and kissed hm. "I have been considering what you said; and I mean to stick to you—to you. You say that I may come to rank, and riches, and live in a very different way from this, if I

give up all thoughts of—of every one but you. But you must know well, that I never think of that. I would rather be, as I am, without those things; if I only have you, and you love me, as you used. I will try to think no more of—of poor John Westcombe; or of any other person in the world, but you. Only, it would break my heart, to go away, and be rich, and gay, and high, without him. He would think that I had deceived him, sold him, cast him off, for bright things, and great people. I would rather be dead; than be thought of so, by him. I will give him up, as you require it so. But not disgracefully—father, not disgracefully. I beg of you, to promise me one very little thing."

"My darling, there is nothing that I would not promise, rather than see you cry, like this. You know, that you are all the world to me."

"I used to think so; but how can I think so now? The only thing I ask you to promise me, is this—that if I give him up, I shall still stop here,—here, where I have nothing; only things to love me; and where I cannot seem to have thrown him by, for grandeur. How I wish I was a little girl again, coming home for the holidays, with nothing but a Sunday hat!"

"What would Mrs. Pugsley say to such a wardrobe? My dear child, there is no earthly reason, why you should work yourself up to such a fervour. I have asked no pledge of you, and want none. I love you very dearly, dear; and all the better perhaps, for being just a little bit excitable. I hate cold-blooded people; though I am considered one of them, by those who do not know me. But surely you may have enough of confidence in me, Rose, to let me take my own time, in a matter of this kind. I have never asked you to cast off young Westcombe. I was certainly very much put out with you, for the things that took place beneath the leather-coat pippin, wrongly called the crab-tree. But I have forgiven you all that, because —because you are my darling Rose. And the utmost that I ask of you, is to wait. One way, or another, I shall soon know what to do. I may have to go away, and leave you, my dear. But I dare not leave you here, at present. I could have left you happily at Exeter, either with your good school-mistress, or with Mr. Tucker. But she is away, for her holidays; and he has no ladies in his house, at present. If I have to go suddenly, I must even trust you to the charge of Mrs. Pugsley, at Moreton; as soon as we are quit of the poor general."

"I am sure she would be very kind to me, indeed. I could do very well there, if you must go. But oh, father, don't go, if you can help it. I shall be so miserable, without you. And who will look after all our things here? What would become of all these grapes, for instance? I am sure there is a fox prowling after them, already."

"Well, we must hope that he would find them sour. Now come home, my darling. I have no heart to work any more, after seeing you in this grievous state."

As soon as they were gone, black Wenlow rose, and filled his pipe, with a happier heart than he had enjoyed for months, and years. He was conscious, according to his special form of conscience, of having done a very noble act indeed. But when he got back to the *Raven*, and found (upon clambering in, at his open window, and going down to order supper) that his gun had gone off about half-past five, he was wroth at the waste of such ingenuity. For no clearer *alibi* could have been proved, than the one Mrs. Howell, and two visitors in the tap-room, were ready to depose to, from the proof of their own ears.

He deserved to have his slippers, like a

gentleman at his inn, who pays his way, when he can do it; and he felt that after having been so good that day, he might trust in providence against police. One of his chief merits was, that (in spite of some luxury during boyhood) he had taken to the bogs, and windy life; as if he had been born without a cradle. That was a side-shoot, so far as one may guess, perhaps of his sporting tendencies. If so, how much more was it to his credit, not to shoot a man, when he had him on his bullet! Into all this he entered, with the exhaustive comprehension of a fine mind, dwelling on its owner's compensations. Then he made a great supper, to support introspection, and slept, upon a four-footed bed, the sleep of the just, with two guns loaded.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOME CONFUSION.

REASONABLY now was Mr. Gaston discontented with the state of things. There was not much to stand between him, and the dark flight of disgrace and ruin—"transportation beyond the seas." There might be even more than that. Forgery (lately a capital offence), was still considered next to murder; and he might get a term of hard labour first, before patriotic farewell. He had freely exerted his power to write the old earl's hand to a nicety, as well as robbed him in fifty other ways; and now the account of his stewardship lay under difficulties, far more appalling than those of the unjust steward in the parable.

So long as the old earl lived, George Gaston felt himself safe against that account. Indolence, bad health, and general cynicism had led the aged man to defer strict inquiry;

though his faith in the agent had never been profound, and of late years had grown less and less. But he said to himself, that he should go from bad to worse, if he introduced new hands, to rob him; and Gaston contrived, by many insolent devices, to keep out any who might interfere, especially the good firm of Latimer and Emblin. But now the old nobleman had nothing more to do with this world; except in the posthumous form, of last will and testament, and black-edged paper. George Gaston had left him to wrestle with his death; and there was no one nearer, or dearer, to him than Mrs. Tubbs, to close his slowly vanquished eyes.

When the great physician, Sir John Tickell, came down softly, and announced that all was over, Mr. Gaston strode forth, with a stick of black sealing-wax, nearly as large as a rolling-pin, a coil of wax-taper, and his own signet-ring; and he said to all the servants, "I must do my duty; let Tubbs come round the house, with me. I require a witness for this act." But nobody could tell him where the housekeeper was; so he took the trembling butler for his witness.

"As sole executor, I am responsible for the safe custody of everything," he pronounced, with an air of sad importance; "all his lord-

ship's jewels, plate, documents, &c., must be put under seal at once."

Although he had stolen a good many of them, there were still enough left in chest, bureau, strong-box, writing-desk, and the like, to occupy him one good hour, in the careful discharge of this solemn duty. The butler carried a roll of red tape, and a sharp pair of scissors; and whenever the seal would not go on the slit, the tape was stretched across, and sealed.

"That makes five and thirty done, and the two room-doors, containing all the lighter things;" Mr. Gaston wiped his red face, as he was speaking; "sorrow, and duty, are alike dry things. Jenkins, go down for a bottle of old port, and be sure to bring the winding cork-screw. Here, take the key. Only one bottle, mind you." "As if I was a thief!" the old man muttered; for Gaston had the gift of offending everybody.

"Down with it, on the big table in the dining-room, you poor old numskull; will you never understand, that I am master now?"

But timid as he was, and shaking knuckles out of elbows, Jenkins had too fine a sense of order, to obey such orders. With the skill of ancient vintagers, he drew the cork, and set the bottle

down upon a marble slab, with two glasses by it, that he might have one.

"Be off, old chap!" said Gaston; "when I want you, I will ring. Don't let any undertakers come near me. Tell them to send estimates to-morrow morning. Nothing else keeps such robbers down. I am in a position of responsibility; and I must have time to turn my thoughts. No, Mr. Latimer! Not now, not now. To-morrow morning, if you please."

For here was Mr. Latimer (of the reputable firm of Latimer, and Emblin) advancing in the full power of grief, at the loss of a client of importance. His ancestor's shoe-buckles flashed upon his insteps, for he had not stopped to put gaiters on; above them his black silk stockings shone; the frills of his shirt were as stiff as a sting-ray; and his face as dry as a law-digest Behind him strode his tall partner, Emblin, swinging a cane of rather sporting aspect; and behind Mr. Emblin came a gentleman, unknown to Gaston, but in haste to introduce himself.

"Gentlemen, this pleasure takes me by surprise;" Mr. Gaston spoke loudly, for they seemed to be coming on so; "decency might have induced you to wait, and self-interest too; for this is not at all the manner, to secure my

custom for your firm. I understand my duties, without your aid. And you should at least have waited, till I sent for you. But as you have chosen thus, to act without me, I shall be bold enough, to act without you. When I need your services, I will send. Jenkins, show these people out."

"Sir, we have no wish to intrude upon you," Mr. Latimer replied, as he took a chair, and waved his hand to the butler, to close the door; "and indeed we need not do so, if you will withdraw. But under the late earl's will, it is our duty, to see to the safety of all his effects, before the preparation of the inventory. We shall, therefore, proceed to seal up all keys, papers, jewels, plate, and such like, and place a trusty person in possession, until we can communicate with his lordship's son. If he declines to come forward, and desires that you should continue in the agency, we shall take his instructions to that effect in writing, and gladly place everything under your charge."

"What an old fool you are," said Gaston, opening his square jaws, with a haughty grin, "to throw up a lucrative connection thus! If you had played your cards with any skill I might have continued you in the business

slow and stupid as you are. What's the good of coming here with that old will, made at the death of the boy, months ago? Under this later will, I am sole executor; and all is left to my discretion. There now, what do you think of that, my friends? Fie, fie, what are lawyers come to?"

"Sir, we are come, to do our duty; according to the best of our belief. If you hold a will, of the purport you describe, duly executed, and of later date than the 5th of the present month, we have no more to say; except that we shall scrutinise it closely, because it is at variance with our instructions. Otherwise this is the last, and therefore the only valid will, of our lamented client. You will see the date; the fifth day of September, anno domini, 1840. It is brief, and certainly somewhat curt, and bald, deficient perhaps in that fulness of language, which a legal education alone can impart. Nevertheless most creditable to a layman—" Mr. Latimer bowed to Mr. Snacks—"and as valid a will, as I have ever yet had the honour of perusing."

"Let me see it." George Gaston's high colour had ebbed, to the tint of the paper of the will.

"Don't let him touch it;" cried Snacks prematurely.

"Under correction," Mr. Latimer said gently, with a bow of repression, to the lay-minded Snacks; "my duty is not to permit the original to quit my possession, however briefly. But we have prepared two copies; one of which my valued partner, Mr. Emblin, will have great pleasure in handing to you. Perhaps you will peruse it, and inform us, whether you have anything of later date." Mr. Emblin lifted his long form, and grimly smiling held forth a sheet of draft paper, headed, "Copy of the will of the Right Honourable Earl Delapole, etc., etc., bearing date Sept. 5th, 1840."

Gaston glanced at it, took its meaning in a moment (because it was not a lawyer's work) and quelling his rage by a desperate effort, made the last cast of audacity.

"Really, gentlemen," he said, "perhaps the best thing will be, to call in some one else; some one quite neutral, and not a mere lawyer. The poor old earl's mind was so vacillating lately, and designing people plied him so—that Tubbs for instance, who goes in, I see, for £1000 in this document,—that it seems to me only too probable, that none of these wills will

hold water. I believe that mine—I will not be quite certain, for I knew not that the date would be so important,—is two days subsequent to this of yours. His lordship rallied; and his mind improved. He again perceived, who was his real mainstay; and he remembered the baseness, and cruelty of his son. It matters but little to me, you are aware; for my position in any case, is a mere trusteeship. His lordship has not made me the heir, even of the little he could dispose of. The bulk of the property is in settlement. Only I feel perhaps a little goaded, at the idea of being kicked out (after so many years of confidence), through the intrigues of a woman like this Tubbs. It was probably Tubbs, who got this will made. She has long lived apart from her husband, if she has one; and his lordship was given to gallantry."

Here was a new light shed upon the subject. Mr. Gaston saw, that he had made a hit, and folded his arms, for his words to soak in; while he was trying to remember whether there would be any chance, of shifting snugly the date of the will, under which he was the master.

Lawyers generally perpend—to use a word

of their own—towards that solution of a problem, which involves the lower view of human nature. Moreover, there always is among them, an inclination for old channels, a desire to treat still, through, or with, the "party," through, or with, whom, they have treated hitherto, and a hovering doubt about loss of good connection, by siding with the powers not established yet. Mr. Latimer looked at Mr. Emblin, and that loyal partner returned his gaze. But suddenly Mr. Snacks cut in.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it cannot be pretended, that I have any interest in this case. Mr. Gaston has proposed to call a third party in, to settle something about dates. Well, here am I, a third party fair enough; able to put down twenty thousand pounds, and without twenty pence in question here. Also, although but a layman, able to make out the date upon any document, in the English writing of the present day. If this good gentleman doubts about his dates, (which are apt to go out of the best head, in trouble,) let him put the other will in my hands; and I will very soon tell you, which is the correct card. He spoke of it as being in his pocket now; or at any rate he tapped his coat over it. And if he will

hand it to me,—why there, we need have no more trouble."

"Sir, it is a sensible, and frank proposal," Mr. Latimer replied, with some relief; "and if Mr. Gaston meets it frankly, we will abide by the issue, for the present; at least as regards the present custody of effects."

But Mr. Gaston would not meet the challenge; for the very good reason that he could not. It would take him some hours, at least, to shift the date, and bribe the two attestants.

"All this sounds very well; but it is not business," he said, with all his ancient arrogance. "It is more like child's play, than sound legal sense. I stand here alone, without any legal aid; and I will ask Mr. Latimer, and Mr. Emblin, as experienced men of law, whether a trustee, placed as I am, in great responsibility. would be doing his duty, by assenting to such a hugger-mugger style of business. Gentlemen, you know that I am no lawyer. I am acting entirely in the interest of others. And I might have a bitter account to render, if I took another step, without legal advice. There is no advice, that I should prefer, if the question were my own, to that of the learned firm here present. But they are precluded, by their

position, from giving me their valuable counsel now. I hope to have recourse to them hereafter, and probably large dealings with them, as his lordship's habitual advisers. For the moment, however, I must ascertain, from other sources, how I stand. I have realized, by years of honest labour, a sufficient competence to make this matter one of supreme indifference to me. But acting for others, I must do my best; and I shall not flinch from an unpleasant duty."

"Gammon!" said Mr. Snacks, or began to say it; but was requested to reserve his observations.

Then Mr. Latimer, after a little quiet conference with his partner, arose, and spoke decisively. "We have no wish to take you by surprise, Mr. Gaston, or to force your intentions from you. We will gladly meet any one appointed by you, and consider his views, in an amicable spirit. Neither do we entertain any idea of 'kicking you out'—as you rather strongly put it. On the contrary, we hope for your good-will, to which we shall have some claim, by relieving you from onerous, and unprofitable work. Our course is clear; and nothing, except the production of a will, superseding this, can make our duty doubtful. We

will not, for the present, remove your seals, but simply place our own beside them—a duplicate security, so to speak—and it will help us much, to follow your suggestions of value, by noting what articles you have sealed. Our senior clerk, who was out on business, will be here by this time, and will do the manual part, and remain in charge, until further instructions. If you will come round with us, so much the better; or send with us any one you think fit. You clearly understand, that we must do our duty; and no sensible man can take offence at that."

While the senior partner spoke, Mr. Emblin fingered the little golden horse-shoe, in his white cravat—which was all the gamesomeness he dared to carry about him in office-hours—and fixed his eyes as keenly upon Gaston, as if he were the Derby, or a great sculling-match. Also, Mr. Snacks was regarding him, as sharply as if he had been a share-list. And Gaston detested to be stared at.

"How much more of this?" cried he, with his furious temper leaping forth his eyes, and his broad face in a blaze again; "you are taking a little too much upon yourselves, with some dirty paper, you have forged. Quips, and

quirks, and Does and Roes, and d——d rogues all the lot of you. I'll tell you what I'll do, to settle it. I'll kick out you two thieves myself; and fetch up a scullery-wench, to put out this old ass, with the shoe-paste; who is too weak for me to handle. Pull up your coat-tails, you two sneaks; and give me a fair run at you."

"Try it with me first;" said Mr. Emblin calmly. He was not a weak man, though of slighter build than Gaston.

"Allow me first honour," cried the ever ready Snacks; "here I am, sir; kick me out."

Mr. Gaston could have done it, without much trouble, and began to make a mad charge at him. But suddenly, his face turned purple-black, his closed fists fell at his side, and his thick red neck could not support his head. Down he fell upon the floor, with a crash that shook the room; the fire of his rolling eyes went out, like a spark from a chimney vanishing; and a gush of bright blood, from mouth and nostrils, dyed the broad plaits of his breast.

"Run for a doctor;" cried Mr. Latimer, "give me that cushion; keep his head up; cut his collar open with your pen-knife. Oh dear, oh dear, what mischief comes of taking the law into one's own hands!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SHORT MEASURES NEEDFUL.

However, on the whole, it seemed at first, as if Mr. Gaston could scarcely have done better, in this risky coil of things, than go off both his head and feet, and become a helpless patient.

Whenever a man is ill, (however he may have earned his illness,) a fount of pity, and good will, arises, in the breasts of all, who are not brutes. Especially, when he is a man of strength, and power, that seemed to defy small ailment, people, conscious of their own more common weakness, feel for him kindly, and put off hard measures, with the popular spirit of fair-play.

Mr. Latimer had a most amiable heart; Mr. Emblin, though sharper, was not hard. As soon as the doctor had pronounced, that further excitement must prove fatal, and that nothing but the free flow of blood had saved his patient

from a fatal stroke, the lawyers resolved to proceed with their duty, as tenderly as possible. The best room in the house, and all its comforts, were placed at the service of the steward; and every one was to attend to his orders, as if he had been the master still. None of his seals were removed; but those of the firm were placed beside them; and everything was done, as if it still were doubtful, who might be the true executor.

The old earl was buried, with a quiet happy funeral, in the heart of his land, and among the bones of his forefathers. All the servants had good mourning, and were ordered to be patient, in the question of their legacies, until the law said, whether they were to have them. Neither did the public, for some days, hear "of the heavy loss it had sustained;" but sustained it, without knowing it.

Although Mrs. Giblets, and her daughter Mary, were beginning to pack up for Exeter, they had bought such a number of things in London, to give to every friend they could call to mind, and to last on the mantel-piece for ever, that Mr. Snacks had to fetch down, from his cock-loft, every ancient port-mantle that would hold together. Mr. Snacks, every morning of

his life, declared, that write he would to brother Tucker, that same day, and no mistake. But every day, when he was girt up to do it, Mrs. Snacks implored him, to wait just till to-morrow; it was so inhospitable, and downright unlucky, to write in front of people, who were leaving your own house. She had known a bridegroom, and bride, and a baby, killed by flying against decency so. And that was before those temptations of the Lord, that he was always meddling with, began to boil on grid-irons.

Moreover, Mrs. Tubbs held out such hopes of the great things, she could well do now (with purest honesty, and sense of trust) in the way of handy little things; which his poor sainted lordship had a hundred times assured her, that he should have no rest in his grave, if anybody else was to steal, and make away with —and after the way she had been spoken of, assert her right she would, concerning what never had been doubted of hitherto.

Mrs. Giblets, in reply to this, was very careful what she said. She heartily desired a great many things, not only for the mantel-piece, but to set up Mary, in a thirty-pound house of her own, whenever she had sown her wild grass—

which is perhaps the feminine of oats—and should come to see that young Jemmy Splinters, of the timber-yard, would make her a good husband. Mrs. Giblets smiled upon Jemmy's suit, for his father was down for Mayor of Exeter, which to her mind was next in county-dignity to the Mayor of Barnstaple. But Mary, as yet, turned her pretty nose up at him; because he had no whiskers. But her mother was confident, that these would come, with the bottles she had seen at the London hair-dressers, whereof she had collected a fine store for him; and then Mary, who was reasonable, must give way.

Mr. Gaston entered into none of these niceties of behaviour. Being ordered to keep his head well up (not only in figure of speech, but of body), he sat in the earl's long cushioned chair—a chair as extinct as pig-tails now. It was a wonderfully easy chair; and a natural mind (however active) would have gone to sleep in it, after so much loss of blood. But Mr. Gaston was not of a nature, that could at all be counted on. Whatever thing he ought to do—not from a moral point of view, but according to analysis, or synthesis, or human diathesis, or anything else, whereby philosophers guide, explain, and

actuate human action—that thing was the very last, that he would do.

He should now have been thankful (not only as a duty, but as a necessity of nature), to Latimer, and Emblin, to Mrs. Tubbs (who brought him good soup, made with her own hand, little as he deserved it of her), and even to Mr. Snacks, who tried, with a hundred horse-power of charity, to doubt of his villainy, because he was so ill.

But he was not half so ill, as they supposed, and as he wished them to suppose. With the strength of will, which always helped him, and had made him what he was, he fetched his mind back, to meet his troubles, and his bodily power, to be up and doing. There was not a day to be lost, nor an hour to spare; if he hoped to save himself. Any minute, the jump of events might catch him, and the crash of his character bury him. Was he to lie there, and await the stroke; or strike for himself, as he used to do?

His pride in himself, and contempt of mankind awoke, as he thought of his enemies; and he rang for three new-laid eggs, a long glass, and a bottle of Solera. He broke the raw eggs into the big deep tumbler, filled up with wine,

and swirling round the mixture, gulped it off, and flung the tumbler at the doctor's bottles.

"I am your lord," he shouted to old Jenkins, who was wondering whether it would kill him; "if you want to escape the workhouse, Jenkins, your only chance is to stick to me."

"Yes, my lord! yes, sir, I should say. I did hear, the last thing was—that you was to have the property."

"Right enough. No doubt of that. Why you know it, you old fool. Who signed his lordship's will but you, last week, at Mr. Foil's desire!"

The old man rubbed his eyes, and thought; and then he said; "I disremember; things go through my head so, now. But I have heard say, that you can't sign, without forfeiting of legacies. And we was told there was £50, old and young, for all of us. Disappointing, after fifty years, sir; disappointing, I do say. But if my three young grandsons gets it, the same as their old granny, we must try to put up with it, sir, forgetting of the merits of the family. The Lord hath justice in his eyes. Though would a'been a fairer thing to think on—£200 to me, and their share independent."

"So it would be. It is very hard upon you,

my old friend, after so many years, and all you have been trusted with. To give Tubbs a thousand pounds, and you fifty, is an insult as well as a robbery. But under the will you signed, there was the power to me, and the order to me, to divide a thousand pounds among the servants, according to my own judgment. And the first thing I should do, would be to pay you down £500; to do whatever you like with."

"Well, sir, I'm sure I don't know nothing. The times is so much against us all. They tell me, it will come to a fight of lawyers; and not a honest soul get a sixpence of it."

"That's a heap of lies. We can keep out the lawyers, and all the pack of robbers round us; and do proper justice to the old retainers, by establishing the rightful will. Why, you must remember signing it, no longer ago than Wednesday week? Call upon your memory, Jenkins; you will have to swear to it. Are they all off now, to the funeral?"

"Yes, sir, all gone. Only three carriages! Why there was six, when the young lord died, and that was called out at, for shabbiness. Nothing is ever done now, as used to be. They asked me to go; but I said, 'no, thank you; not behind less than four horses, to disgrace myself.'

Five and thirty miles to travel; and only the hearse, and one carriage, have got four!"

"They will come back by rail. But they won't be here, till six or seven, this evening. I feel better; I shall take a little walk in the garden. Keep the rest of the servants, indoors, I tell you."

"Bless my poor old bones, sir, you must never think of doing that! Why, if anything was to happen to you, Mr. Gaston, how should we ever get our money?"

"Don't be nervous, old chap. I am better. I feel as strong as a horse again. Stick by me, and I will stick by you. Jenkins; they want to give me the sack; because I am too honest for them. And they want to do the same with you. Your interest is bound up with mine. We shall beat them. Never fear. You know what thieves those lawyers are. They want to throw it all into Chancery; and then no one gets twopence, except themselves. But they reckon without their host, old boy. Tubbs is gone to the funeral, of course. Tubbs is a spy; and she wants to rob you, and your grandsons, and every one of us. Such things make me ill, to think of. I must go, for a breath of air. Let no one know, that I have left my room.

You get away, and have a bottle of port wine. They never even offered you a glass, I'll be bound. A nice way to conduct a funeral!"

In a few minutes, Gaston, with a large cloak on, and a strong oak stick to lean upon, slipped out of the door in the ivied wall, found a cab, and drove off to Hunter Street, and thence to an alley called 'Bishop's Gardens'; where he knocked at the door of Mr. Foil, a lawyer not too legitimate. That gentleman, with his usual discretion, was not to be caught, in his first blush, at home; but gradually came down to that condition, after long mediation of a boy, who could be trusted, because his name was 'Bill Foil.'

"I thought you would never come down; and I have not a moment to waste," said Gaston; "how can you be so hard up, as all this?"

"Hospitality! hospitality, my good sir; you can understand it. It has brought down our family, to answer their own bell. And yet with my abilities, experience, and character, any day we may go up; any day we may look down upon our enemies."

"Meaning the fools, who have given you credit. Send away that grinning brat of yours;

I want to speak to you quietly. Have you any place free from listeners?"

"Rather;" said Foil, with a pleasant wink; "you know what my love of silence is, surpassed, my good sir, by my love of nothing, except sterling honesty; of which I regard you as the champion."

"Among the blind, the one-eyed man is king. Your clients are a shady lot, I fear. Well, here we are snug; and let us have no humbug. You remember this will, which you prepared, and attested, together with the shaky old butler, when the earl was in his right mind, and knew his meaning? Thieves have got hold of him since, in my absence, and have made him sign something scandalous. Downright robbery; and honest men should leave no stone unturned to baffle it. I would rather pay a thousand pounds, than knock under to such villainy. Now don't begin to talk about caveats, tedious law-suits, and all that. The remedy is short and simple; if we are resolved to have our rights, and sweep aside wretched formalities. To make a man do what he meant to do; as long as he knew his own poor mind."

"That question will be for a jury, I fear; and it always is a most ticklish one. A thousand

pounds is but a drop in the ocean, when we come to fight a will."

"I know that; and the reason is plain—because it goes into so many pockets. But a thousand pounds in one man's pocket, without a farthing to pay out, and with plenty of legal pickings to come, is enough to make one labour for the right."

"Put it plainly," said Mr. Foil; "What am I to do, for the thousand pounds?"

"As simple a thing as you ever did; and a thing as truly respectable. This will is dated 7th of May; it ought to be 7th of September."

"Well, you are a bold one, Mr. Gaston! Transportation for life is what it comes to, on conviction. And to face it out, with that old Jenkins! Jenkins has no nerve at all."

"All the better for that, you stupid. Jenkins is not certain now. He has no memory; but you have. Remind him of something he did that day; and that will prove it to him. There is nothing like a fine old fool, to baffle the sharpest lawyers. Make an entry, in your day-book, under 7th of Sept.—'Prepared, and attested Earl Delapole's will;' and out with the leaf of the 7th of May. It will not take them

by surprise; for I have prepared their minds for it. I told them, when they produced their will, that I had one of later date; and was going to submit it to a lawyer. Enter my visit to you to-day—'Mr. Gaston, to consult me about the recent will.' Make me a copy, to flourish before them, with the date Sept. 7th. I shall not let them have it in their hands. They will take it for the original; it will be in the same hand-writing; and when they come to see the real thing, they will believe, and I shall swear, that it never has been out of my possession; unless they stole it, while I was ill. You know plenty of fellows, who can take out ink, without a sign. Make one of them do it, upon something else, for a test of skill; and steal some of his stuff. Don't let him see the will, of course. Nothing can be easier; and you see, the date occurs but once."

"The cash is not sufficient, to sustain one's conscience, in a task like this. There may be justice in it; but her scale must have more weight than that."

"I knew, that you would try to drive me. But remember that, happen what will, not an acre of the land will ever come to me. All that is in settlement, and goes with the title. Why,

if I get my rights, you must know as well as I do, it will scarcely come to fifteen thousand; including the old house, which is unsettled. I will give you ten per cent.; fifteen hundred that will be; five hundred, as soon as we can get probate, and the balance as soon as I realize. And here—you can have fifty on account, for expenses."

This, as Gaston knew well enough, proved the most tempting bait of all. To a man who lives from hand to mouth—which is the true way to taste things, and to lick one's fingers deliciously—the ninepence on the nail is more, than the noble in the neighbourhood. Mr. Foil put his hand out; and the rest was a question of detail.

"Only one thing must be certain. Without one assurance, I do nothing," said Foil, at the end of a longish talk, "and that is that the new man must not turn up. If once he gets to London, all is over. He lives in some outlandish part, and he has not heard of these things yet; according to your account of him. If once he appears, it is all over with one's desire to do justice. The lawyers will be as keen as cats, in their obsequiousness to him. I know what a difference it makes, when a man attends to his own work.

All will be sifted; nothing will pass muster. Seals will be broken, accounts pried into, dates raked up, and the deuce knows what. Their place is to fetch him, without losing a day. And how do you know, that they have not done it? You may find him in the house, when you get home now."

"No fear of that. I have masked him well," Mr. Gaston answered, with an easy smile. "Those old fools may have tried to find him out; and find him out, in the end, they must. But it won't be done in a day, I can assure you. I can promise you at least a week, without him."

"A week is not enough; nor yet a month. You know how slowly the law moves. It is not himself, that we need fear; for, from all that you say, he is an idiot. But it is the effect, that his presence would have. You know all about him. You must contrive to keep him away, for at least three months. Nothing can keep him from the land, and the title. But if we get probate, we may snap our fingers at him, as regards the part that concerns us. You can realize everything, and be off."

"My good fellow," said Gaston roughly; "leave that part of the affair to me. Brace up your mind, and this little document, to the

correct chronology. I will take this copy, with the proper date upon it; and expect you with the real thing, to-morrow. Then I shall place you, as my agent, in possession, and set off westward, to confront the foe. I feel quite confident of defeating all their tricks, crafty humbugs as they are. Now keep yourself stiff. Do your work, and earn your money. That has always been my rule in life."

He got into a cab, and was enraged to hear a nasty buzzing in his ears, a sound as of a hive of bees, at sunset, after a busy August day. "Pest upon the doctor! His filthy drugs fizz in my brain. He has made me like an old jakes of eighty. If it were not for that beastly Devonshire job, I would sham for a week, and they would dare touch nothing. Ha, a fine idea! With young Mills to help me, and Sarah, and old Jenkins, I might be gone three days, before they found it out; and three days ought to cook his goose for him. Think, think, think! Dash me, if I can think! I must have a flip to my system."

Returning to his room unseen—for some of the servants were gone to the funeral, and the rest were drinking their good health—he obtained his flip, in the form of half a tumblerful

of Irish whisky; and then with all his colour restored, and even heightened, sat down to consider his urgent condition. He was playing a desperate game, as he knew, and one that required even more of luck, than skill; but either he must play it on, for some stages further, or fly at once, a beggared, and a banished thief.

In the days, when he might have laid up store, from the proceeds of embezzlement, he had spent as fast as he stole, being even more a gambler than a niggard. He had taken time by the forelock now, so far as to seize and hide the cash-box, before the intrusion of lawyers; but fully confiding in his own position, he had not destroyed all the proofs of his robberies; but had sealed up many things, and so got them sealed against him, into which he should rather have dipped his fingers. Mr. Latimer had left a trusty agent in possession; and Gaston could get hold of nothing for the moment, good enough to run away with, and forego all chance of further booty. Therefore, he must carry on for the present, taking his stand upon, and maintaining the will of which he was executor; until it should come to the test of a law-court; by

which time he might be prepared to retire, with competent pickings, if danger arose. Of course, Mr. Foil would never get more than the £50 he had jumped at; unless things went so smoothly, that the proving of the will might pass, without challenge, or by compromise.

First and foremost of all was this—to prevent the arrival of the present earl, alias Captain Larks, alias Mr. Arthur. He might be an idiot, as Mr. Foil had said; but such is the enthusiasm of the English mind, that great people generally may lose their wits, without lessening the admiration paid to them. So if Captain Larks now were to march up the big stairs, with a basket of apples on his shoulder —which he was capable (in body and in mind) of doing, and of whistling all the way —every mind, and body, in the house would knock the doors down, with joy, and acclamation, and my duty to your lordship. For still there lingered among them, legendary lore concerning him.

But the wily Gaston—who, but for his violent temper, might have been a first-rate rogue, equal to any of this finer generation—had so contrived things, that Latimer and Emblin

(although they had written to Captain Larks, direct by post, as "L. Arthur, Esquire," and had received—as they supposed—his answer) sent off in the wrong direction now, to find that newly important client. In their books was the copy of their letter, addressed to him at "Christowell, near Exeter," followed by the entry of that very rude reply; a copy whereof had been sent to the old earl, and had driven him to execute that hasty will, in May. To Gaston, however, it was undesirable, that they should preserve the correct address, which he had given them for his own purpose; and therefore he had said, "It was a wonder almost that your letter ever found him. Nobody ever calls it 'Christowell,' now; though that may have been the old name of it. 'Carswell' is the pronunciation, and the mode of spelling now in vogue." Upon this, Mr. Latimer, void as yet of all suspicion, had carefully erased, (with penknife and with pounce, in the diligent manner of a fine old firm) the genuine name of that very happy village; and had set it down as "Carswell." Now there are three Carswells (as Mr. Gaston knew, having taken the trouble to find out this) in the region of Devon, round about the loyal city; and per-

haps there may be more. At any rate, the missive, or the messenger, would have to exhaust first Carswell proper, which is a hamlet near Honiton, and then King's Carswell, and then Abbot's Carswell, which are in the neighbourhood of Torquay; and when that was painfully done in vain (by means of cross-country lanes, and rough hirings), it would have to be reported, and fresh instructions waited for

"Meanwhile," thought Mr. Gaston, "short measures are needful. I shall cut down straight, screw Wenlow to the sticking-point at once; and then come back, to meet scandal, at my leisure. Who cares what is done in those wild parts? That gardener must be sent to the garden of Eden. The people in the distance, the far-off cousins, are a poor lot, who will jump at their good luck, and be easy enough to handle."

CHAPTER XV.

A STROKE OF BUSINESS.

It is all very well, for strong-willed people, to stand up for their rights, and to kick against their wrongs, and to shove the world out of its way, to get their own. But how much more worthy of consideration (and therefore how much less likely to get it) are they, who being of a weak-willed sort, rejoice in the joys of the good folk around them, and soothe their own woes, with the woes of others!

Dicky Touchwood was under urgent orders, to render himself up, on Monday morning, without more clothes than he could put upon his back, to the driest of all the dry-salters of Plymouth, Mr. Growgray of Stonehouse Wall. Dicky had neither strong mind, nor strong will, nor anything else very strong about him; except the desire to be pleased, and as an echo (weaker, but generally on the premises, when

the weather permitted it) a desire to please all who pleased him; and the echo's main refrain was, "Beer—beer, after the rain, and beer again—let nobody ask for beer, in vain."

This form of sympathy is perhaps of all sympathies the noblest. It touches a key—the tap-key perhaps—of the human system, which frees the best fluid, and speeds the quickest thrill, through the human barrel, up to its oral vent-peg. When it was reported, at Touchwood Park, before service-time on Sunday, that Squire Dicky was to be turned out, and sent into a bacon-shop—for that was what it came to—there was not a man, and much more a woman, in, or around the park, and belonging to it, who did not cry scandal, and get up in haste to see it.

Dicky was the hero of the day, and felt it. Instead of withdrawing from the public gaze, he put on his brightest apparel, and went to church, with some fine independent farmers, who cared not a snap for Sir Joseph. "We'll see you through it, sir; you keep your back up," was the comfort, and counsel, he received on every side; and several young ladies, who had thought him "rather fast," longed to kiss him, in the absence of witnesses.

"Am I to be debarred from my own son?" Lady Touchwood asked, with the concentrated essence of pathos, in her voice, and eyes. "Shall he be torn from my arms, before I have fitted up his dressing-case? Oh, Sir Joseph, you are a wilful man, and you always have your own sad way! But reflect, I implore you; ponder, I implore you, the results of this sudden, and outrageous whim."

"It is not sudden; and it is no whim. I have had it in my mind, for months. You know nothing of the circumstances. The boy wants pulling down; we all want pulling down; and now we shall have it, with a vengeance. To-morrow, I shall see the auctioneer, about selling this place, this gilded millstone round my neck, which has been the ruin of me; and off we go into lodgings at Plymouth."

"After all we have done, to be a credit to you!" Her ladyship burst into a wild flood of tears. Through all the hot weather, she had kept her temper, in her daughter's absence, so that she scarcely knew herself; and this was all the reward she got! But Sir Joseph had nothing more to say. He had put on the shabbiest clothes, he could find—and he had some of most friendly shabbiness—although it

was Sunday, and he ought to go to church, at least once, for the sake of example. He treated his partner in life to a sniff, which meant, "You may cry away, as long as it amuses you;" and then he walked off to his own little room, and locked himself up, with some cash-books he had brought.

"He may starve, if he likes; but you don't catch me at it," Squire Dicky exclaimed, when his sister brought him word, that the table was not to be laid for dinner; "I suppose he's broke at last. I have always been expecting it; and that has made me so thrifty. I heard an old chap at Cambridge say—'chousing, and carousing, leads to out-housing,' and we shall all have to turn out to-morrow. Not that we have had much carousing, however. What blunt have you got, to begin the world with, Judy?"

"I am not going to tell you," his sister answered; "you'd get it all out of me, and spend it, before the shops were open."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. Marry old Short, and make a crib for us, I don't approve of the 'wide, wide world.' And a dry-salter I never will be; I never will be a dry-salter; sooner would I lose my liberty, by putting

my neck into a halter. There, I made that in church to-day, with the ladies admiring my waistcoat. Not so dusty, for your most obedient!"

"Adversity will indeed have sweet uses, if it fetches your slang out of you. But in reward for your brilliant stanza, I will invite you to dinner to-day. In my room at six o'clock. Mother will be there. She has been crying so, and she looks so poorly, that I cannot ask your friend. He must think he has fallen among strange people, to get no dinner for two days."

"Not he! He is a gentleman, and regards it as one of the many ups, and downs, of trade. He knows, that we are only tradespeople, and must dine upon the counter, when the business is pressing. I have told him that we always do it, when the ships are sailing, for fear of his being uncomfortable. He says that he enjoys it; but he must be off this evening, by the mail from Ashburton."

"If there is anything I detest," Miss Touchwood answered, with a tranquil brow, "it is to hear of trade continually. Trade is such a low thing; commerce is the proper word; and even that has nothing lofty in it. Make your friend

understand, before he goes (if so stupid a gentleman can understand) that my father has nothing to do with either trade, or commerce; but is simply and solely, a government contractor, moving in a very wide circle, discharging duties of the first magnitude, and commanding European confidence."

"I had better ink it up, to have it right this time. I'll tell him all that, on the way to the coach; and then at the tail of it, I shall stick in, 'but the governor's busted up now, and must go back to the apron he began with, in the lollipop shop at Plymouth.'"

"There will not be any dinner in my room to-day." Miss Touchwood spoke with dignity; and departed, to preserve it.

That stern announcement compelled the young squire, to hasten to his mother's room; which he had shunned, all day, through terror of maternal outburst. But now he must try hard to get dinner, both for himself, and for his guest, who was being dismissed so curtly. And in that just enterprise he succeeded, to and beyond his warmest hopes; for her ladyship, having allowed herself to be trampled on so shamefully, was now in the growing tumult of recovery, and reaction.

"Sir Joseph is master of the dining-room," she said, after bedewing her son, with one of the last tears left in her system; "in all high circles, the master of the house is the master of the dining-room. But feminine,—or perhaps rather I should say, according to the way in which you look at it—masculine licence stops there, my dear. Good society has always maintained, as one of its first rules of existence, that the drawing-room is the ladies' realm. There they may do anything they like, among themselves, without being interfered with. They may lock the doors, they may play pianoforte, they may order up anything from the cellar, that—that they can get the keys to. When your father built this house—and I am sure, I wish that he had never done it, to be a 'millstone round his neck,' and to turn us, neck and crop, out of it—I took the trouble to buy a book, laying down the laws about great people, their rooms, and their dress, and their habits of feeding, and the way they behave to one another, and to the people they have nothing to do with. I knew it all, well enough, being of a highly respectable family myself, my dear; as you may find yet, if your poor father goes to prison; but it is a great

point to have anything printed, because it must be impartial. Therefore, I shall order you some dinner in the drawing-room, and come myself to see you eat it; and you will be welcome to bring in that large young man from Trinity—this trouble has driven his name out of my head—I mean, of course, the one whose bottles your dear papa kicked over."

This was managed well; and Julia, proud but not relentless, came; and the large young man from Trinity, sighed, according to his magnitude, whenever he could sigh aside. For not only was he large, but tender; and the pricks of the barb, that were meant to sting him, had acted as with a good rumpsteak—they had only made him sweeter. But feeling that he had no money, he sighed behind his handkerchief. Julia gave him several glances, in her well experienced style, soft, and rich, and to be cherished; so that his heart might ache quite nicely, when he was a hundred miles away.

Lady Touchwood saw all this, and thought that her daughter should not be so cruel, even on a Sunday; the best day of the seven by rights; but the worst in fact of cruelty. For then, do schoolboys bully most; then do men

most beat their wives; and then are all the great battles fought. And then Sir Joseph Touchwood raged, because he had little else to do.

When Dicky came home, in a gloomy mood, after seeing the last of his friend and hero, his mother watched for him, and found time to say a few words privately. "You are ordered to go away, to-morrow; and you must show obedience. Your father is in a very dreadful state; through some heavy losses. He cannot be contradicted now; and I have borne with him, like an angel. But as for your going to that dry-salter, it shall never be, while I have breath. Bring me the bag you put your beer in, for your sporting expeditions, the one you strap across your back; and I will put you up some things. And then you shall have a good hot breakfast, and set off for Christowell, before your father comes downstairs. I have written a letter to Mr. Short, begging him to be most careful about the airing of your bed. I have asked him to ride over here, as early as ever he can do it, and to come in by the stable-way. He will comfort me; he always does, because he knows my nature; and I shall endeavour to make him useful, as he always likes to be. It

would not do to write it down; but you might say (if he should happen to ask) that poor Julia is in great distress, and has no one to rely upon."

Smelling a rat, as he coarsely put it to himself, the young man obeyed, and on the Monday morning knocked at the vicarage door, with his knapsack on, when the parson was sitting down to breakfast. "Well done! We shall have an earthquake now," said Mr. Short, as Dicky marched in, with some contempt for people, who were just come down to breakfast; "in the name of wonder, what has made a lark, of such a lie-a-bed?" Then Dicky sat down, and told his tale and produced his mother's letter. In an hour's time, before Sir Joseph had his sulky meal upstairs, Parson Short was holding council with the lady of the house. "I have no real friend, but you; and you always know what to do," she added, after full detail of woes.

The vicar knew little of commercial matters, and even less of heavy contracts, handled like a balanced pole, which may crack the operator's skull. But having shrewd sense, and more doubt of Sir Joseph's truth, than of his skill, he thought it most unlikely that the great contractor had lost his balance, beyond all recovery.

"It is but a trick of his," he thought, "to get out of some bad job." But he could not say that, to Sir Joseph's wife.

"It will all come right; depend upon it, with patience, it will all come right." He smiled as he spoke, for Lady Touchwood's faith in his wisdom was amusing. "But what can I do, without the risk of fatal offence to Sir Joseph? He is not the man to put up with any meddling by—by a stranger almost to him, although an old friend of yours, and eager to be of any use to him."

"No," said the lady; "I quite see that. Nobody would think of meddling with him. But it might be possible perhaps to ascertain what the public opinion is about it."

Public opinion had not yet arrived at its present condition of debility, when it goes with the pull of some sledge-dog journals, or the push of the man who can swear the hardest. Therefore Mr. Short did not disdain it; but asked—"where is it to be got?"

"Only in Plymouth," said Lady Touchwood, "and I can't bear to think of such a thing."

"Of such a thing as my going to Plymouth? Why, what is that for *Trumpeter?* About two-and-twenty miles, by the Post-bridge road; and

he can have three hours' rest, while I lounge about, and call upon some friends. I know a man who knows everything, about the business-people—I mean the highest mercantile circles—and without an inkling of my object, I can learn —you will understand."

"Whether my husband is bankrupt, and the roof over our heads our own, or not. Oh, Mr. Short, what a blessed, happy, thing it is, to be in the Church of England! There you can do what you like; you have your own parsonage, and your own opinions, and your own time to do nothing. Everybody looks up to you; and you go out in the morning, to see what the people are about; or not to see it, if you don't like. You order your dinner, and they send you presents; and you think how much work you have done! No wonder you are wise; no wonder you can advise poor women well."

The parson laughed; though he could not think that this description of his duty did fair justice to his trials, and earnest labours to be master of the parish. But he knew that nothing can change a lady's opinion upon great subjects (any more than it can upon little ones), and so he slacked *Trumpeter's* curb three links, for a long day's work, and mounted.

"This is a new turn of things, and a very nasty one to my mind," he thought, as he struck from a bridle-lane, up a combe, into the old Roman road; "who can make either head, or tail, of the things that may come out of it? That I should be put to discover the state of Sir Joseph's affairs, for his wife's satisfaction! I should have declined such a ticklish errand. It will require the greatest tact, and what I detest—some subterfuge. But he must be almost a brute, to keep his own wife and children, in the dark. He is playing some deep game, and recks not a rap, how wretched he makes them, to suit his own ends. Perhaps my first impulse, was right; but now, right or wrong, I must go through with it. Go along, *Trumpeter*; we are on a smooth road now."

The worthy horse put his best foot foremost, for his spirit was willing, and his flesh not weak; so that they were both in Devonport, ere the dockyard-men streamed forth to dinner; which is a date of the day to be trusted, for rapid punctuality. Then the parson, having seen his horse in comfort, and kindly receiving nourishment, called upon a quiet man, a Christowellian, own cousin to Mrs. Aggett's relicks —as she called her dear dead husband—and

now rising steadily into social excellence, as a widely esteemed ship's chandler. His name was Codd, and he was mounting into such a sphere of wholesale merit, that he was beginning to nod to Sir Joseph, instead of touching his hat to him, and had even shaken hands with him, at Christmas times. But he did not pretend to be on a par, with the vicar of the parish he was born in.

"Servant, sir," he said to Mr. Short, touching his forelock, like a Sunday-school boy; "glad to see 'e, once again, sir. And how are all the good folk up to home, like?"

"Pretty well, considering the long dry weather. I never saw the moor so parched before. Our people say, that Colonel Westcombe's grouse have done it. But I want a little talk with you, Master Codd."

Codd was a simple, straightforward fellow, getting on slowly, by dint of downright honesty, attention to business, and heed of ancient maxims. Mrs. Codd (who had been a housemaid at Lustleigh, wooed by Codd with his apron on) happened to be upstairs, engaged in the periodic increase of an honest race; and so there was freedom of tongue, and of ears.

"I hope you may be wrong," said Mr. Short,

as soon as he had heard the other's story, which came without any questions, for the subject was hot, that day, in Plymouth; "and I cannot help thinking that you must he wrong. Sir Joseph Touchwood, after all his years of dexterity, and of experience, should be about the last man in the kingdom, to break up suddenly, as you describe."

"Well, sir, I only know what I hear tell; and I heartily hope, it may be wrong. Many a poor head will ache, and many a poor belly quag, if it is so bad as they tell me. And I am sorry for the poor folk round our parish. Sir Joseph hath found work for a sight of 'em, in the winter-time; so the people tell me. He mightn't be altogether honest; but he hath been honourable. And if he hath failed, you may say for certain, he hath failed respectably."

"That means for a big lump of money. The morals of trade are wonderful. Tell me, Codd, since it is town-talk now, where I shall have the best chance of correct particulars."

Mr. Codd told him; and the parson, with excitement most unusual with him (because he was full of things larger than money), hastened to the gentleman, who knew all about it, according to his own belief, and that of all the

public. This gentleman was not inclined however to impart the smallest decimal of his knowledge; until Mr. Short spoke very plainly to him, and declared that he was likely to be involved in it. It then became the duty of the business-man, to come down with the truth, to the utmost of his knowledge; and the parson thanked him, and went to fetch his horse.

Then his horse fetched him, at such a pace (because he was on the homeward road, and his shoes were got into wearing) that it was not dark to a clear-eyed man, when the parson of Christowell pulled the bell of the great front-door of the Touchwood house. "I want to see your master himself," he said. "You can't see Sir Joseph, sir, I fear, just now. He is not very well to-day, and he keeps his room." "Then let me see him, in his room. I simply insist upon seeing him. Show me where he is, without any message."

The man obeyed, for he held Mr. Short in some awe, for various reasons; and presently the vicar was face to face with the great contractor, in his private room.

"Mr. Short? Ah!" Sir Joseph spoke mildly, after closing his mighty oak desk with a bang, to indicate sense of intrusion. "Important business, Mr. Short?"

"That depends entirely upon how you take it. You may think me troublesome, but not, I trust, impertinent, when you have heard what I have to say."

"Sit down, and say it, my good sir. You are the last man to be impertinent."

"Very well. You are a man of business, Sir Joseph; and so am I, in my little way. To-day I happened to be in Plymouth"—Mr. Short coloured, at this highly-coloured version of the fact—"and there I heard things which grieved me. I heard that your firm, the first in the West of England, was in difficulties."

"Oh, they say that, do they? Very well; supposing it to be so, we are not in your debt, that I am aware of."

"No, you owe nothing to me. But I owe something to you, after many years of hospitality and kindness. And now you can do me another kindness, by letting me make a good investment. I have long been looking for a sound investment for £25,000, which came to me about two years ago. If I may place it, at fair interest with you, I shall be under a deep obligation."

"What you mean to say is, that you will have placed me under a deep obligation."

"I mean what I say. I have perfect confidence in your sagacity, and enterprise. I know that the sum which I mention is nothing in vast affairs, such as you conduct. But I wish to secure for myself a good chance; however selfish it may be of me. If you think five per cent. too much——"

"Fifty per cent. would not be enough for money invested in a falling house. Sir, you have made me very grateful to you, for your faith in me, and most friendly offer. I shall never forget it, while I live; for not one of my best friends has come to do it. But I am happy to tell you, Mr. Short, that, although I have suffered serious loss, my business is as good as ever; and I can put a guinea on the top of every shilling I owe in the world. I tell you this, in strict confidence; for I wish to alarm my own family. It is high time to stop their most reckless profusion, and to pull them up sharply upon their marrow-bones. I have not said a word, that they can lay hold of; I have left both them, and the public, to form their own opinions, about my affairs; because it suits me, at this time, that both should be certain of my bankruptcy. Concerning the public, I will not tell you why, though it is a legitimate

enterprise. But concerning my family, you know as well as I do, that they winnow my gatherings on every wind of whimsy. I have pulled them up, and I shall keep them so; if you respect my secret. It was my good wife, who sent you to Plymouth. Tell her exactly, what you heard there."

Mr. Short was a little surprised, and showed it. He thought that he had got away most cleanly, on his Plymouth expedition, and accomplished it most cleverly. But here was the subject of it, looking at him, as if he had been the ordaining cause. Sir Joseph smiled, and took the upper hand again.

"Tell her exactly what you heard; and let her have a night of it. I have had many a night of tossing, with the way they have scattered my substance. It is time for them to have a turn. I have not let even my daughter know. A man may be blown up with a ton of powder—such as I have just got on my books—and the women don't care what becomes of his pieces, if they can only pick his pocket up, with money for their laces, and ribbons in it. Short, you are very wise, to be a settled bachelor. Good-bye; I shall bear in mind your kindness though."

Mr. Short disliked that reference to his present domestic condition; for if anything had moved him beyond the lines of prudence, to the tune of a quarter of a plum, surely it was not misogyny.

But Sir Joseph shook his hand, more cordially than he had ever done before, and looked at him, with a deep gleam of heart in his well-worn eyes, so hard in general, and so bound in business vellum.

"Henceforth, that man is my steadfast friend," thought the parson, as he went downstairs; "also he thinks highly of me, for having so much cash to spare. But my part is difficult, none the less. I must not allow it to be imagined—and then there is this puzzle, about poor Dicky. Ah, Lady Touchwood, well met indeed! I was coming to look for you quietly."

Her ladyship thought he had just arrived, for she saw his horse, led to and fro by a groom. "Come in, and tell me all," she said; "I can bear the worst, better than this suspense."

Being bound by her husband's confidence, he could tell her only what they said at Plymouth. But seeing her deep distress, he could not help adding some words of comfort.

"You know that I do not say things rashly

I am sure, that all this is grossly magnified by malice and envy. You will see Sir Joseph rise above it, like a lion, or rather perhaps an eagle; and it will have done good to your spirited son to be restricted for a while in cash, and credit, and sportive joys. I will feed him, as well as he ought to be fed, in the proper course of dry-salting; and I will borrow a gun, having only one left, and walk him off his legs with *Nous*. He shall stay with me, till this little breeze is over; for I am not afraid of Sir Joseph."

"You are the best friend I have ever had. How could I compare Captain Larks to you? But do please to see that my darling boy puts his feet in hot water, for half an hour, every time he wets them. Oh, Mr. Short, you do manage people so, how I wish you had Julia to keep in order!"

"Ah," said the parson, with a bright blush on his fair well-nourished countenance; "that is a happiness too high for me. But I would try to be equal to it, Lady Touchwood."

CHAPTER XVI.

CRANMERE.

"'Tis a terrible rough road, sir," said the famous Mr. Perrott, of Chagford, not then so widely known as now, but already called 'the Dartmoor-guide,' "or rather I should say, no road at all, after you be past Kestor rocks. But you can't miss the way, without a fog comes on; if you go according to my directions."

"Thou art very accurate; and I am not a fool. After passing Kestor, I see Watern tor, about two miles to the west, the one with the hole in it, which thou sayest a man of great stature can ride through. When I get there, I go south-west, and cross the Walla brook, as thou hast called it, and then over some rough ground, to another little stream, which is the head-water of the Taw, and then over a hill, to Cranmere pool."

"You've got it as right as can be, sir; but

you can't get to Cranmere very well on horseback, even now that the bogs be down so. In the winter-time, 'tis a bad job afoot; without you know the ground as I do. But now, if you go heedful, there isn't much to risk; for the oldest man never knew the moor to be dried up so. All the black places are safe enough now; for the crust is firm on the top of them. And wherever the rushes grow, you can step freely; but you must have a care of the bright green moss; for it won't hold a dog up, let alone a heavy man. But you better let me come with you, sir, though I'm not very fond of Sunday jobs. You may be within a score landyards of Cranmère, and never find 'un after all. I've known a party beat about the hill all day, and come home, and swear, there was no Cranmere."

"Spare me that rubbish, friend; unless thou art afraid, that this queer-looking horse of thine will break down."

"*Charlie* break down! Not unless you throw him. *Charlie* will travel three-score miles a day, without bit or sup. He is true forest-breed. Only you put him up, where I told you. But mind you one thing. No weather won't hurt *Charlie*; but it may hurt you, sir. And to my mind, the weather will break up, before the day

is out. The sky was all red in the east, last night; and the moon lay as flat as a frying-pan. 'Tis eight o'clock now; you should be there by eleven, allowing for roundabouts, and bad travel; be back here by three o'clock, if you can sir."

The elderly gentleman, as he appeared (who had slept last night at the *Three-crowns* Inn, and hired Mr. Perrott's best horse for the day), set off, without answer, at a good round trot; with the murky morning sun behind him, and the heavy dry air slowly waving the silvery locks, beneath his broad-brimmed hat. "Queer sort of a Quaker, to my opinion," the shrewd Perrott muttered, as he went back to breakfast; "I have heard say, that they take no heed of Sunday; but never, till now, that they can put away six rummers of hot brandy and water, in an hour and a half."

That spirited explorer, Mr. Gaston, who had accomplished this feat last night, and now looked the soberest of the sober, rode on apace to the bridge across South Teign, and then through Teigncombe, to the foot of Kestor; where all road failed him, and the wild moor lay around. Then he pulled off his hot Quaker hat, and hotter wig (both of which he had

bought at Exeter) and hiding them in a deep tuft of bracken, at the foot of a tall rock, which he would know again, wiped his warm forehead, and used hot language, concerning the state of the weather. For the glare of the scorched earth rose, like a blister, and the coppery clouds compressed it; and the sparkle of splintered and powdered granite, like glistening needles, pricked the eyes. Mr. Gaston's face came forth in spots, as his mind came out in tainted language; for which there is no space, but gaps. Then he drew from his pocket a folded cap, to cover his tawny cropped head from flies, and getting upon *Charlie*, set forth again.

His landmarks were plain, and far too plain; as he might have known, if he had ever cared for nature. The delicate haze of fair-set weather (which had mantled the hills, for weeks and weeks, till the power of the sun dispersed it), was gone altogether, and the soft gaze of distance was shortened into a hard near stare. To the north, and west, the beetling slabs, and jags, and juts, of many a pile (Steperton, Mill-tor, Yes-tor, High Willhays, and others shouldering under them) seemed scarcely half a mile away, so clear was every seam and scrag. To the left, as he trudged up Okement hill, having left his

horse in an old peat-hut, he could see the dark bulk of Fur-tor, the most lonely and dismal of all the moor, which even John Sage might tremble to approach, in the very bravest sunshine; for this is the haunt of the fiercest demons, that shriek along the windy waste, or howl in the morasses.

Gaston was rather quick of step, for a man of ripe size, and no feather-weight; but he found the travelling full of travail, as he sought for "the mother of waters." It is generally supposed (with as much of truth as there is in general opinions) that five rivers have their fountains here; as if five Naiads could live together. But five get out of the ground, within the space of one square mile, perhaps; and the earth, in the power of such production, cracks and splits, like a thin-skinned fig. Especially on the eastern side (from which Mr. Gaston was striving to get in), deep black channels, interlacing one another, and lapped with heath, required great outlay of long leaps, or much light downing, and heavy upping, of boots encrusted with the cake of mire. As wearisome a plod, as a light foot can go through with, or a heavy one stick fast in, with much aching of the knee-caps.

George Gaston began to lose courage; and bad temper took the place of it. His great square jaws began to work, like those of a panting bull-dog; and his cheeks darkened into the colour of peat-water, where it is suffused with iron; for his recent illness had left its traces, both upon countenance, and in limb.

And a pestilent thing from his point of view —which may not have been a correct one—was the impossibility of finding any steadfast place to stand upon, for the mighty relief of a cordial swear. If ever he stood still, for that congenial purpose—which *non solvitur ambulando*—his heels began to be infernally absorbed, and his foul tongue was jerked into the roof of his great mouth. Thus was he obliged to hold it well, with hard wear, and tear, of constitution.

Suddenly springing from a channel of black ooze, in a labyrinth of deep gullies, roofed with sedge, and heath, he stood face to face with a man, who had risen from a bog-seam, to the same quivering crest. "Who are you?" cried Gaston, pulling out a big horse-pistol.

"You needn't shoot me," replied the other; "I am only going home, sir, and I won't hurt you."

Ashamed of his flurry, Mr. Gaston muttered something about the notorious robbers on the

moor, while he narrowly observed the stranger —a grizzled man, perhaps about fifty years of age, embrowned by the sun, and deeply scarred upon one cheek. He was tall, and active, and straight of figure, and carried a bundle on a ground-ash stick; while he failed not to return with interest, the inquiring gaze which he received.

"If you know this beastly country," said Gaston; "I wish you would show me where Cranmere is. I must have been hunting for it, at least two hours; and as yet am no wiser than when I began. A bumpkin told me that 'he hideth himself;' and so he seems to do, with a vengeance."

"I used to know it well enough," was the answer; "but the ground is so quaggy, that the landmarks shift. However, I dare say, that I can find it; but when you get there, there is nothing to see."

"I wonder who you are? I should be glad to know;" cried Gaston, as he followed, with some trouble, the long light stride of the stranger.

"It may seem an odd thing, sir, but the very same idea came into my mind, about you. Here we are; this is the place, they make a fuss

about. Ah, they haven't seen the world, as I have."

Rightly had he said indeed, that there was not much to see there. In spite of the drought, there was water then (which has since disappeared, through some tapping of the peat), but the water was not large enough, to cast any light, or life, around. The only comfort to the heart of the persevering traveller, was that he never henceforth could be, in a more uncomfortable spot.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gaston briskly; "it has fulfilled my expectations. One thing certain in our life is, to find everything misdescribed. The Fleet-ditch, according to my recollections, presents a more striking scene than this. And the smell of dead stuff is less lively here. Goodbye, my fine fellow; don't let me detain you. It is a Sunday morning; and if there is a place that won't let me in, I shall sit down to moralise. Would you like to have anything, for your trouble? Or are you superior to such thoughts?"

Without any answer, his guide departed; being a rough man of the world, who had learned to form dislikes with swiftness, and to express them slowly. Among the black rifts of the wild, he disappeared, as if he had sunk into

the earth; while Gaston sat down upon a tuft of rusty heath, and his heart became as dismal as the dreariness around. He had worked very hard, and beyond his weakened health, to secure his own purpose—which was good in his own eyes; and he thought it very hard, that his fortune should have driven him, into a place so lowering. For a resolute man of that sort rejoices in stiff hills, and steep valleys; but finds no pleasure in a vast expanse, hovering between hill and valley.

The fault of the man was his selfishness, and the narrow pursuance of his own desires. If he had been born about six ranks higher, in the social scale, educated to that mark, and taught to tread the marble steps, he might have become an ascending figure, and a statue at the top of them. For the firm set will, tough-fibred heart, power to turn wrong into right, and large readiness to dispense with scruples, adorned by imperious rudeness also, would have made him a popular idol. But having had no start in life, save the push of his own hands and feet, he had lapsed into the crooked ways, whose end is desolation.

Some turn of words in his troubled mind, and the melancholy waste around him (darkening

with the heavy gathering of a most peculiar sky) set him perhaps on meditation, a very unusual thing with him. But he shook off that weakness, and returned to his own anxieties.

Lives there a man who can enjoy the grandest of all prospects, with the smallest of all flies in his eye? And in George Gaston's mental eye, were no small perils, disquietudes, and pains. In the first place, although he bore some ill-will towards his intended victim, for crossing his path so vexatiously, he had suffered no personal wrong, to give flavour, and warmth, to the coming atrocity. Scoundrel, and therefore self-deceptive, as he was; yet scarcely even to himself could he maintain, that he had any right to take a harmless life, because it interfered with his. He could only put aside that question, and lament the stern necessity, which drove him; and reflect, that a man who could bury himself in such a dismal wilderness, must be happier, out of this world, than in it. Whose doing was it, that he, poor Gaston, was driven, in spite of all his struggles, to this pass? Why, clearly that fellow's, whose selfish cowardice, and wicked dislike of his own flesh and blood, had compelled another to supply his place, and thus fall into this complication.

"How much longer, shall I beat about the bush? The sky is thickening over; there is no time to spare. To be caught in a storm here, would be a frightful thing."

Rising, he shook his heavy shoulders, and big neck, for the weight of the drowsy air bowed his head; and then he whistled thrice upon his nails, with a sound like the call of a curlew. In less than two minutes, a rough dark man was striding through the swamp towards the pool; the style of whose dress was not church-going.

They saluted each other, without much good will, or courtesy of expression; and then the last comer sat down, and crossed his legs, and stared at his visitor complacently.

"You are not at all the thing, my city friend," he said; "you want a course of Dartmoor. London life, gambling, and hot whisky, play old Harry with the constitution. If nature had gifted you with a delicate complexion, what an interesting subject you would be! Come down, and live under the peat with me. Dry, genial, bracing quarters. I will board you for a fortnight, for £10."

"There is no time for rubbish. I am come to know, why you have forsworn yourself."

"There are many legal axioms that might be quoted. A bad oath is honoured by the breach. And again, no man is bound to the impossible."

"What impossibility has there been? That would be the only excuse for you. Unless you can prove that, to my satisfaction, things will go badly with you, Master Wenlow."

"Threats become a joke," replied the other, with a smile; "when the threatener is wholly in the power of the threatened one. You have gallantly ventured into the lion's den; and without my permission, you go forth no more. You are covered by a carbine, where you sit; and to shoot me, would only bring your own death-shot. Look round as much as you like, George Gaston; but you will not see my noble mate. Now listen to sound reason, and attempt no threats. I went, to carry out my agreement with you. But the man's daughter came between us. Could even you have slain him, in the presence of his child? If you could, take the job out of my hands altogether. Why don't you do so? For the crime is just the same. But I suppose, you cannot trust your eye, like mine."

"I suppose so," returned Gaston, for he

wished to skip that question; "at any rate you must do it, quite alone. You must not take that other ruffian with you."

"What ruffian? George Gaston? Oh I see, you mean my friend, who is watching my interests! No, he knows nothing of this little by-play. He is under a cloud; but he never could bring himself to shoot an honest man; as you, or I, might do. But he might shoot you. Ah, it is not complimentary! But you don't stand upon such trifles now."

"I am here upon business; and not for stale jocosity. You are entirely outside the world; you have no chance of returning to it, in this stiff little kingdom. I offer you the chance of a new world, where you may start anew, and cultivate your much neglected virtues, rise in position, found a family, and look back upon this boggy period, as no more than a black dream gone by. In exchange for all those blessings, you have simply to remove one worthless life. A life extinguished in disgrace already, tired of itself, and desirous to depart. And what is that to you, who have taken two already?"

Gaston's coarse cynicism foiled itself. Without those last words, he might perhaps have

conquered. For the other man was desperate, and well-nigh sunk into that black depth of our nature, in which we scorn our lives, our brethren's, and the will of Him who gave them. But the sense of wrong was vivid in a soul, where the power of right lay prostrate.

"It is a lie, a gross lie!" he shouted, overbearing Gaston, with the fury of his eyes, as he pressed down his shoulders, with the vigour of his hands. "They died through me. But I did not kill them. If anybody knows the truth, you know it. Without you, none of it would have happened. Gaston, I believed, that there was no devil. But when I look at you, I am sure there is one."

"Once more, there is no time for bandying words. You have broken your pledge so abominably, that the fellow is preparing to start to-morrow. If he once gets to London, you will rue it, more than I shall. This very day, you must carry out the matter. You know his ways, as no one else does. Do it; and be off to-night for Falmouth. There you shall have your passage-money to New York, and five hundred clear, to make your fortune with."

"It cannot be done for the money. Five

hundred! A thousand is the very least, that I will hear of."

"It is out of my power. I cannot do it now. Be fair with me, and I will be generous. Five hundred down, and you shall have security, for the other five hundred, in six months' time. That will be much better for you, than to have it all at once."

"A thousand thanks, for such thoughtful kindness. But now, as you have no time to lose, understand me. You say that I have taken two lives already. Very well, that is enough for one lifetime. My conscience pricks me, through your words. I will not commit this murder for you. I have done many bad things; but nothing half so villainous as this. Go, and do it yourself, George Gaston; you may trust my honour, not to peach."

"Scoundrel, after all that I have done——"

"Hard words break no bones, my friend. Pop at me, if you like; but first look round, and see my body-guard, as dead a shot as I am. Mike, stand up. Our friend is pugnacious. Ah, now you are wise; to shoot me would never help you. One word of counsel in return, my friend. I have seen you rather nervous in a thunderstorm. Well, the heaviest and

biggest, there has been for generations, is gathering in the south-east now. If you are caught upon the moor, and lose your head, you will certainly get bogged; unless the lightning saves the trouble. Farewell, George. We shall never meet again. If I were revengeful you would not go so."

Without further ceremony, off he walked and vanished in a shaggy cloof, beside the black morass; while Gaston glared, with pale amazement, terror, and fierce anger.

CHAPTER XVII.

SEEKING REFUGE.

ABANDONED thus, in this desert place (the most "unkid," both to see and feel, within the British kingdom), Mr. Gaston lost his temper—or rather found, and gave way to it—for the valuable space of half an hour. He was not weak enough to suppose, that powerful language has power upon facts; but he was amply weak enough to find comfort, in the free trade of words, called "swearing." Then his spirit came back to him, much refreshed; and that his bodily strength might tally, he put away one pistol, and pulled out another, whose charge was liquid, and discharged it.

"A flip for the desert, and the bogs, and thunder. This Dartmoor is but a trumpery hole," he exclaimed with the 'Dutch courage' rising. "It is something to have saved a thousand pounds, and to do these ticklish jobs,

oneself. That cowardly fellow tried to frighten me with thunder. A liar he always was, and will be. Why, the clouds are clearing off!"

Overhead, for the moment, the dull air lifted, and a dirty yellow light streamed down; but before the hope of this grew stronger, a low growl trembled far away.

"Tush! It is those fools firing, at Plymouth. Admiral come out of church—or something. They are always making some row there. I will get out of this beastly oven. Two cannon-shot never come into one hole. A man, who has been struck by lightning once, must be free of it, like small-pox. Those fellows who call themselves 'electricians,' are nothing but thundering quacks, after all. How can there be any such thing as special attraction, in certain persons? Bah, I don't believe a word of it. Besides, I don't believe, there will be a storm at all; and if there is, it will draw to the highest spots, like Yes-Tor. George Gaston is not going to be scared for nothing, in this crisis of his fortunes. Forth among the blessed bogs again! I am beginning to understand them."

This sanguine view of the position restored the deep red colour to his cheeks; which lasted for an hour, or more, while he plodded on, right

stubbornly, over and through the shaggy fen-growth, scorched at the top, and sodden at the bottom. Then he came to a little dark-eyed runnel, stealing from its cradle-head, with tottering uncertainty; and tumbling into little flutters, where it lay, and rested.

"This ought to be the Taw; but I am much afraid it isn't," thought Gaston, pursuing its direction for a minute; "instead of the Taw, it must be the Tavy; and instead of getting near my horse, I must have gone away from him."

A sudden shift of the panting air, and wavering light, had misled him. For the track of the sun was now lost in the sky, as completely as if he were quagmired; while a flit of tawny haze obscured the coronet of distinctive tors.

In a rage with himself, and the weather, and the world, he turned upon his track at the head of Tavy cleeve, and making a correct landcast this time, found his way to the fountains of the Taw, and so to the peat-shed.

Here Mr. Perrott's stout horse, *Charlie*, was getting uneasy about the weather, and had well-nigh jerked his bridle off. With gladness he accepted Mr. Gaston's weight, and set his head towards the Chagford stable. For he was a native of the broad moorland, and inhaled the

subtle tissue of the cloud and breeze, as if he were the west wind's legal heir, though restricted in the airy part of his own system.

"This is all very fine, old chap," said Gaston, whose coarse nature must have coarse expression; "but before we get back to Thirlstone, there will be bellows to mend, and no mistake. But go ahead, while you can, my boy."

The willing horse made play, with vigour, and with gaiety, among the rugged boulders, and the combings of the tussocks, and the tiring softness of the many oozy tangles; till the roughness of the ground, and breathless burden of the air, began to tell upon his lathered flanks, and legs that wanted scraping. He panted with long labour, and began to hang his head down, as he carefully put foot after foot, on the steppy rise that winds along the breast of Watern-tor. There Gaston halted him upon a rocky platform, and took a careful survey of the wild and threatening prospect.

By this time it was rightly manifest, both to man and beast, that a great turmoil of the world above them was preparing to break loose. Over the heights, dark clouds were piling, like sacks upon a wool-comber's wain; in the deep glens, heat-fogs still were huddling; while along

the followings, and ins and outs, of landscape, a confusion of the settlement, of light and shade, was moving.

Mr. Gaston felt his hair prick up, and the whole of his system throb with fear. He looked for the Kestor rocks, the most conspicuous height in front of him; and lo, they were covered with a depth of tempest, letting down vast loops of gray! He looked to the right and left, along the hollow reaches of the waste, and towards him rolled the sable billows of storm-clouds big with thunder.

Then his spirit failed within him, and his heart sunk low, and he deeply wished for a cellar, or a cave, in the bowels of the wholesome earth. He durst not go for his broad-brimmed hat, and wig, concealed in the bracken, but urged his reluctant horse, out of the homeward-track, and down to the low ground. This led him to the source of the South Teign; and so along some winding bottoms, to the Moreton road. Gaston, in his terror, would have been too glad to set off at full gallop for Moreton; and as it was, he followed that road for some distance, until it began to mount a cloud-capped hill, another nucleus of the storm. For according to all accounts of that great tempest, it

differed from all others within memory, not only in power and extent, but also in the manner of its formation. For it neither came with the wind, nor against it (although first appearing perhaps in the south-east), but accumulated gradually round the whole horizon, converging steadfastly towards the zenith, and compassing (as with a great black tent) the whole of the moor, till it filled it all with fire.

As yet, there had been neither flash, nor peal, only one or two distant rumbles, over the sea, or the lowland. And except for a strange thick feeling, and a difficulty of breathing, and a weak uneasy drowsiness, a man (who was a moderate conductor) might have got into a quarry pit, and gone into his conscience, without extreme severity. Mr. Gaston, however, had a lively sense of being too good a conductor, and he found himself tingling already, with a nervous surcharge of electricity. This added considerably to his alarm; and he would have been glad to perspire it off; but his ploddings in the sultry morning, and great radiations of violent expression, had left the bodily surface dry, and clogged with saline particles.

"All haste now for the *Raven*; what a fool not

to have thought of it!" he whispered to himself, for he feared to speak aloud, lest it should bring down the impending thunder-crash. "This hollow must lead towards it; and there is deep shelter there. Get along, you old screw; what are you afraid of? The proper thing, for you, is a stout crab-stick."

The horse deserved none of these coarse reproaches, being ready, and steady, both in saddle, and in harness; and now if he were nervous, whose fault was it? He felt that his rider was in a great stew of terror; and he would not have been a horse, unless he shared it. And above him, on his off-side and his near-side—from his own point of view, a ridiculous distinction—unknown monsters, without any love for horseflesh, were preparing, with tremendously long lashes, to descend on him. Away for the *Raven*, or for any other spot, where manger, hay, and brother horses could be found!

Suddenly, he heard a pleasant sound, a sound associated in his healthy mind, with a quiet day's rest in a meadow, a discourse through a hedge with a ladylike cow, or a tranquil survey (with the chin upon a gate) of a road, that will not jar the hoofs, till to-morrow—the sound of a

bell, calling human flesh to church. Clearly enough, it was a large rich bell, a long way off, in some high tower, melodiously, with measured swing, inviting all of a quiet mind, to hear good words in a holy place. Through the menace of the brooding storm, and deepening awe of cloud and crag, the mellow tone came, gently varying, with the ebb, and flow, of sound. To a youthful sinner, scared and checked, it might have been the pulse of mercy, or throb of some good angel's heart.

But this old offender had no such thoughts. All his misgivings were of the body. If church, or chapel, would save his body; that was the sacred place for him. He pulled up the horse, and with his hand spread from his eyebrows, peered along the hovering arcade of storm. Rising from the lower level, half a league away or so, and not as yet enveloped in the cloud-mass of the moor, was a shapely tower of fair granite, the finest, and best proportioned piece of masonry, round Dartmoor. Successful miners had built it, as their free thank-offering to the Lord, in the days when men were not too sublime to believe in a Power over them. It was the tower of Christowell. The bell, with native silver rich, the largest of the seven,

ceased calling; and the four o'clock service was begun.

"It must be more than twenty years, since I saw the inside of a church," Gaston communed with himself; "but any port in a storm, we say; and nobody knows me hereabout. And if they did, it would all tell for me. Larks will not be there, of course. But I will not go, if I can help it. On for the *Raven*, if we can. When the storm is gone by, my time will come."

He was keeping to the right, to pass the church afar, and get into a track below the crest; when the volume of the storm came sweeping towards him, like a rolling-up of heaven. "We will hasten to the house of the Lord," he cried, in a stupor of wild ribaldry, shot across with memory of childhood's faith, and of kneeling beside his mother. In a few minutes, he was at the churchyard gate, where the coffins rested in bad weather; and he pulled the trembling horse in through, and knotted the bridle on a tombstone.

They were singing the psalm before the sermon, with an unusual depth of voice, encouraging one another's vitality, as they do at funerals. Each man, with his open mouth, nudged up to his neighbour growing dark to

him; and the women in the lower row, held hands, to keep their voices. A peculiar smell oppressed the church; as if the dead were rising.

The great west door beneath the tower, was open, where the bell-ropes hung, with the frayed hemp glistening in the darkness, like so many hangman's nooses. Gaston stole his way between them, to the pillar of the western arch; and slipped into the church unseen; for every mind was overborne, with a heavy load of doubt, and fear; and every eye was cowering, at the creeping shades of roof, and wall.

The cold awe of the vaulted gloom redoubled Gaston's terror; and he sank upon a low bench fitted round the octagonal plinth of a tall, gray pier. Then he pulled off his flexible hat, and muttered some confused words into it; and if they were not words of prayer, it was from want of practice.

The vicar, with a slow and solemn step, went up the winding pulpit-stairs, every rustle of his surplice sounding, through the breathless hush around. And when he knelt, for his own silent prayer upon the cushion, the murmuring of the Christow brook came in at the chancel window; and was heard throughout the church by many,

who had never heard it there before, and never should hear it anywhere again.

The parson's voice was trembling slightly, not from fear, but solemn awe, as he pronounced his text, the prayer of David in the hour of dread—*Let me fall into the hand of the Lord.* Before he had pronounced it twice, thick blackness fell upon roof, and window, pillar, arch, and sepulchral stone. A man could scarcely see his wife, or little ones, at his elbow; mothers caught their children up, to be sure of being near them; and the preacher's voice came out of night.

In this last moment of his life, Mr. Gaston knew not what he did. Supreme terror held him, soul and body; while his blood, like a boiling fountain, rushed. A delicate figure, dressed in white, stood near him at the column's base. Trembling, so that he could not stand, he spread one hand before his eyes, with the elbow on a ledge for books. Then his other hand came forth, and clasped, in the wild hope of some saving power, the skirt of a gentle maiden. It was Rose, who stood with her form so straight, and her face as firm as marble; the daughter of the man he was come here to murder.

Then fell the greatest crash of tempest ever

known in England. The tower was cleft, the church was rent, the people cast, like blasted straws. The roof flew wide, the pillars snapped, the timbers fell like cobwebs, and the walls were riven as a bladder bursts. Pitchy night, and stifling vapour, shrouded all who were unconsumed.

This was not for one moment only; but (if any human reckoning of such time were possible) to count it by the things that happened, makes five minutes of it. For instance, there were eight boys piled upon the communion-table, who after their dinner had been at school, and were sitting round the altar-rails. They all got off, when their sense returned—which could not have happened immediately—and then another electric fling, though less severe, replaced them. Also, it is quite certain, that a man who was surviving (being Thomas Read, the warrener) made the first attempt to go out of church; with his brindled dog, covered in sulphur sparks, sniffing the way in front of him. But when the dog came to the arch of the tower, where a man was sitting steadfastly, he was caught up, and whirled seven times round, and cast upon the step into the tower, as dead as if he never had been born. This made

Thomas Read draw back, and saved him from an unripe end; for the bier of the church, with its six legs flying, went by him like artillery practice, and must have passed through the chancel window, being found in the thatch of a linhay below, when the burials were done without it.

All, who got over it, are agreed that it must have gone on, for at least five minutes; and some say, a great deal more than that. It began, with a great ball of fire descending, and splitting the north side of the tower, then scorching all the bell-ropes, and passing up the nave, after killing one man in the archway. Then it killed another man, with his head against a stone, by driving his skull into the granite, took all the hair off an elderly woman (her Sunday hair, new that morning), and then parted into a big globe, and a small one; the big going out through the roof, and the small one through the chancel window.

After that, nobody knows what happened; for they all fell down upon their faces, with the thundering of stones, and beams, above them, and conviction of the Judgment-day. In the stench of sulphur, men held breath, and women chewed their handkerchiefs. Through the

woodwork of the pews, they could see the lightning, to and fro, like clotted snakes; and a roar (like an overshot wheel in a flood) rang along their backbones. For it was not one explosion only, but a continuous rush and blaze, of which there is only one other instance * recorded in this country—a volume of solid fire, like that fearful power 'field-lightning,' which wraps with flame a league of herbage, in the Jura Mountains.

When the worst was gone, but the shattered building filled with blue sulphureous fog, and smother of bitumen, the first to stand up was Farmer Willum, being the parish-warden. "Neighbours, in the name of God, shall us venture forth, as many as be alive of us?" he asked, for he could not see the parson, through the thickness of the air. But Mr. Short stood up in the pulpit, unharmed, and without any sign of fire; and he said, with a resolute voice, "Not so; first let us thank the Lord, who has preserved us; and then let us pray, that our courage may return." With great presence of mind, he put by his sermon, to do for the next

* The great storm at Widecombe in the Moor, Sunday, Oct. 21, 1638.

Sunday afternoon, when he added some most impressive words. One of the covers had been consumed; and the other bore the image of a death's head upon it, stamped by the lightning, or the fire-ball. To the present day, it is as plain as ever; and it has been declared, by all who knew him, to be the head of George Gaston.

CHAPTER XVII.

SENT TO JUDGMENT.

In a commemorative poem, even finer than that inscribed upon the tablet, where the fire first came in, the gifted author (who is said to have been the schoolmaster of the village) has inserted the following apposite reflection—

> 'Oh that our people, with as good a heart,
> Would come to church, as then they did depart!
> True zeal were that, oh what a joy to see,
> Them flocking in, as fast as they did flee!"

However, that can hardly be expected, in the present condition of human nature. It is said, that one very affectionate mother was so much astonished, that she went home, without remembering that she had taken her only child to church with her. But coming to herself, when she returned to see the dead bodies brought out of the church, which was not done

until evening, she besought the sexton to go in, and look; and there the little child was found, going hand in hand with another little child, neither of them hurt, nor showing a sign of fear, or fire, in their faces. And it is a remarkable thing, that while seven people were killed, and sixty-two were injured, not a single child in the church was hurt; though the seats, they were sitting on, were torn up fiercely, and some even cast up through the roof.

The reason, why Rose was sitting by the western arch, instead of in her father's pew, was simply that she had been late for the service, and did not like to disturb the people. Her father stayed at home, preparing for that journey to London, which he could no longer put off; although he knew not, even now, the full urgency of the case; because the clerk, despatched by Latimer and Emblin, had failed as yet to find him. But he now was aware of his father's death; and loth as he was to claim his own position, he could not but feel, that his duty to Rose compelled him to come forward.

He would have kept Rose at home as well, because of the threatening weather; but she begged so hard to go, for this last time, and

promised so sincerely to escape the rain, if any, that she got her own way, as usual. But the captain could not help thinking, that he had been very foolish in letting her go. As the sky grew darker and darker, his heart became more and more uneasy; until he could not stay in the house, but must go forth to see things. What he saw, from the spur of the hill, enforced his fear upon him mightily; for the church, betwixt him and the village, was wattled round with thick black clouds, rolling downward spirally. Then it seemed to be swallowed up, with one vast roar, as if the earth closed over it; and then it reappeared, with shattered ribs, and liquid fire running through them, like a metal-foundry. It looked impossible, after that, for any one to be alive inside.

With a crawling heart, the captain ran, as fast as ever his legs would go, not so much to save his dear child's life, as to drag her body from the flames. Church, and churchyard, all alike, appeared to be one mass of fire; which may have been the effect of the sulphur, covering all things with blue reek. He would have rushed into the church, before the force of the crash was over—which also

shows that it lasted long—and perhaps he would thus have lost his life; but the western doors (having square studs of iron) were torn from their hinges, and flung across the way. The same thing had happened to the side-door on the north; but that not being so heavy, Captain Larks was enabled to drive a way through, with his foot; and he was setting off for his own pew, through the smoke and crush of everything—the last explosion of the air, which slew the poor dog, being over—when he saw close to him a soft white figure; and there was his daughter in his arms!

Her beautiful hair had been shed all round her, and she cried a good deal, as might be expected; and her hands, and face, were deadly cold. But beyond that, and her clinging to him (as was natural to life, in so much death) nobody could have guessed, to see her, that she had been in the middle of a fireball. Yet that is truly no exaggeration; let those explain it, who have the power.

"Why don't you come away, my darling?" asked the captain, who was weeping also, in this great relief of heart. "Darling, there will be floods of rain, almost instantly. Do come."

"Father, this poor man holds my dress; and

I fear that he is not well," she said, pointing round the granite plinth. "He was frightened a great deal more than I was; and I hope the Lord has spared him."

But the Lord had not done that; according at least to our ideas. The captain put forth his hand, and laid it, through an especial thickness of air, upon the head of a man, who was sitting forward, propped by his elbow on a desk. The scalp of the man was there, with hair as stiff as wire upon it; also his countenance shining blue, and set in the form of a coffin, as it had been, in his boyhood. But his brains were gone, and lay behind him, in a grey heap on the flags.

"Come away, my darling," the captain whispered, detaching the dead hand from her dress, and getting between, that she might not see; "he is frightfully stunned. We will go, with all haste, and send the doctor to him."

Rose obeyed with a long-drawn sigh; for the scene was not for a female.

Then began the most furious rain, ever known even on Dartmoor. It must have burst forth on the heights ere this; for the Christow was coming down, like a brown wall, jutted on the crest with jags of rock. Three months of

drought were to be made up; and nature spared no effort towards it. Rose, and her father, were drenched, before they passed through the gate of their meadow; and the moment they had crossed the drawbridge, a dash of flood-wave carried it away. Till the morning, they were quite cut off from chance of hearing any more than the roll of deluged thunder, and the rushing of the flood.

But in the morning, coufage came to the stunned, and battered village, and the quiet runs of shadow, where poor people live, and are content. Many a cottage, not so tall as to invite the lightning, nor so big as to challenge the wind-blast, had been robbed of long paternal comforts, and of high maternal pride —settles, wool-chairs, feather-beds, dishes, "dowered with" a gravy-well, and Britannia-metal teapots—by the roaring felony of the little brook, that scarcely filled their kettles, when they went to church. And worse than that, ten times as bad, there was scarcely a cot, accustomed to soft gossip, and loving desire to know all about its neighbours, that was not full of scalding groans, and quick pain rolling in greased lint.

In this deep trouble of the wounded, and

the dying, there appeared a hero, and a heroine. Or, to put it more correctly, all the good deeds done centred by attraction round those two, as in Classic Mythology, and in every British crisis. Now this pair was, Dicky Touchwood, and Sporetta Perperaps.

Poor Squire Dicky, still in exile at the vicarage, and stanch in his scorn of dry-salterism, had escaped the worst issue of that great electric force, by the perfect formation of his feet. Of this he was not, at the moment, aware; but his mother proved it afterwards.

It appears that the lightning ran under his insteps, which were arched by nature (in a Gothic arch, like those of all young ladies now), and instead of tearing, it only tossed him, like the lad of pith he was. Coming down happily on all fours, he was not only unhurt, but filled with activity, hitherto undeveloped, though latent in his system; as a close observer might have judged, from his manner of dancing one foot. And few of the many strange facts recorded concerning that great commotion of the elements, are stranger, than the permanent change effected in the nature of Squire Dicky. Unscientific persons might ascribe that effect to other causes; alarm for instance at his

father's conduct, or daily intercourse with Parson Short, or the fright of the storm, and the narrow escape, or the saddening power of deep suffering around. But science is always correct, and allows no room for any but its own opinion; and science declared that the organic substances, and protoplastic synthesis of psychic neontology, in that portion of the Cantab which was called his mind, had (through the agency of thermo-electric currents) undergone a process of precipitation, not impossibly combined with fusion, which—to put it in plain English—had made him much less of a fool than he used to be.

Thus, when five men could not lift the beam, which had dropped between the parson and the clerk, jamming Mr. Short up in the pulpit, so that he could not help others or himself, it was young Squire Dicky to whom it first occurred, that there is in this country a tool, called a saw. Neither did any one else perceive, until he impressed it on them, that the first attention should be given to the living, and not to those who were beyond all help. For the poor folk were scared out of all possession, by this roaring fury of the Evil One.

For as soon as the people, who escaped from

church, told their story to the people who had stayed at home, they found out the meaning of all that had happened; which they could not in any way account for before, without thinking ill of the House of the Lord. But now, it was much to the credit of the church, that its principal enemy had been inside it. For the blacksmith of Christowell, a long-haired grimy man, never known to go to church, or chapel, had been visited by Satan, some years back, while swearing very hard, because he could not get a plough-share into form. He was panting by his bellows, and his quart of beer was empty, when the Evil One stood by him, with an apron on, and said, "I will do it for you, Josiah, for a very little manners on your part. Promise me, that if you go to sleep in church, I may pass my fingers through your hair." "Done," replied the blacksmith; "for I never go to church." Then the stranger touched the plough-share with one finger, and it smoked, and bent, like a hedger's glove, into the shape required. For seven years, Josiah carried on his business, without going to sleep in any church whatever, because he remained outside the door. But when he lost his wife, his daughter Betsy did persuade him to come to

church with her, on the Sunday next the funeral, to show their black clothes, as all respectable folk do. The weather was so drowsy, and the church so hot, that his head began to nod towards his knees; and then he put his elbows on his new black breeches, and his chin between his thumbs, and could not help snoring. Then there was seen, at the *Three Horse-shoes*, a lean dark figure, on a tall black horse. He called for a quart of ale; and it was noticed by the maid who served him, that it hissed down his throat, like the quenching of hot iron; and the pot smelled of brimstone ever afterwards. When he came to the churchyard, he threw the horse's bridle on the tombstone of a man, who had cut his own throat; then striding in through the west arch, with smoke around him, passed his hand through the long hair of Josiah, and vanished up the tower, which he cleft in twain, with a tremendous thunder-clap.

This tale had been proved to be over true, by a man upon the road, where the air was clearer, who could swear, if it was his dying-day, that while the great roar was going on, a horse with broken bridle, flashed by him, like a mad thing; and Mr. Perrott knows, that his good nag,

Charlie, came piteously crying to get in, that night, drenched, and foundered, and most eager to relate adventures as yet not in human language.

Moreover the blacksmith's corpse was found, more than ten landyards from the church; where it certainly never could have fetched itself.

Miss Perperaps escaped, even more completely than the gallant Cantab, simply by not being there at all, but attending to poor Mrs. Sage, who still suffered from the spines of the hedgehog, on account of her age. Also her father had exercised the medical privilege of contemplating the sacred building, externally. And now these two laboured in their vocation, earning quantities of money, which never were paid. Except that the doctor was wise enough not to part, without the money down, with a single one of his prophylactic antiphlogistic pillules; without which, no person in Christowell ventured near a cloud of any sort, that winter.

One of the most severely scorched, of the sixty-two who got over it, was poor Samuel Slowbury. And this was all the more hard upon him, because he came very much against

his will, and only to oblige his wife, by getting rid of Achan's curse. He had pledged himself on his father's Bible (to escape bad dreams, and scoldings even worse), that he would slip into the church-bag, that day, done up in brown paper, as if it were a penny, those three guineas which he had received for betraying, and spying upon, his master. Not thus, however, was he justified; but paid with his skin, for the sin of his soul. Men of science have declared that no man can survive the loss of more than 28 per cent. of his natural covering against the air. Sam Slowbury lost, at the mildest computation, very nearly twice as much as that; yet after a time of suffering (which made him feel, enough for fifty, and to the end of his existence hate all flies), he was finally restored to his large, but lean, family, with the stamp of the royal mint upon him. Under his girdle—or in stricter fact, his waistcoat pocket—on the toughest of his cracklins not singed off, were two indelible George and Dragons, and one fine countenance of George the Third, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, and Defender of the Faith. Sam charged a shilling, to a great extent, for showing these; and reared an honest family, without excessive labour.

What with the furious rain, and the fright, and the darkening of the evenings—for now it was come to the equinox—the shattered church was scarcely cleared of the poor scorched sufferers, that night. All, who were unhurt, worked hard, under the guidance of Mr. Short, Dicky Touchwood, and Miss Perperaps. After the flood came down in full, the Christow could not be passed for hours, except at one spot, where a pair of granite pillars served to carry some long planks; and this delayed the clearance of the church as well. The large proportion of the wounded to the killed (being almost as nine to one) surprised all who were not in either number, and aroused their pious gratitude. And thus the didactic poet above mentioned, after delicate allusion to Slowbury's case, which he feared to describe too nicely, declares with true poetic force—

> "I am astonished, both in heart and head,
> To see so many, yet so few, lie dead."

Those, who were happily absent, must not speak as if they knew much about it; yet it was maintained upon inquiry, that the rush from heaven, which clove the tower, dashed to pieces all it met; while the fire of the stony

floor, and of the earth replying, burned the outside faces, and skin coverings, of the people.

And a sad case indeed was that of the excellent Mrs. Aggett; who deserved to be spared, if ever anybody did; and was so connected with the very pulpit, that she could speak orders for the sermon's length, to the make-up, and the measure, of her own kitchen-fire. If she had been roasted, with her best dress off, and the little dog to turn the spit, she never could have been more purely browned, and she never could have carried on the noise she did about it.

Mr. Short was much concerned. But knowing many others to be ten times worse, he would not have her seen to first; for which she promised to forgive him, as soon as she should be strong enough. Forgetful of his own interest, he pushed on, carrying with his own sturdy arms some of his charred parishioners, to an empty barn of Farmer Willum's, which was to be the hospital, for those who could not be carried home. Then the dead were taken home; and it must have been quite midnight, when, with lanterns raised, they came to one, unknown to any present.

"What a fearful sight!" the parson whispered, holding back the others. "The face is a very

remarkable one; and the figure is that of a large, strong man. Is there no one here who knows him?"

All shook their heads, as they gazed with awe. "A bad 'un, whoever he were," said one; "I reckon 'twere he, who drawed down the storm."

"Hush!" replied Mr. Short; "who shall judge a man, gone to his judgment? If no one knows him, let him stay. To move him would destroy all knowledge. No rain falls here. Go, and fetch the curtain that fell from the chancel window. We will fix it before him, until to-morrow. All the neighbourhood will be here to-morrow, and some one, perhaps, to identify him. Any one, who has ever seen it, will recognise such a face as that."

So, that which had been George Gaston spent the first night of death, with none to heed it; alone in the awful darkness, and the grisly taint, and ghastly ruins; itself the most awful form of darkness, and the most ghastly ruin.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNVEILED.

"Oh, father dear, even if he comes, I beg you to put it off a little. After all the years, we have spent at Christowell, it will seem so unkind to leave it now. And I am—I seem to feel so very odd, to-day. The things, that I have heard, seem to strike me, like the lightning; after my being in the midst of them. But how wicked of me, to be talking of myself!"

Already, on the Monday morning, frightful, and (if that were possible) exaggerated tales of the Christowell catastrophe had reached Lark's Cot; and the captain's main reason for insisting on departure, at the time appointed, was his dread of the effect upon his darling's health. The furnace of death, from which she had come forth unscathed, like the holy children, might have spared her only for the moment, if she

stayed among the scenes which followed. Therefore he rejoiced that he had fixed that day, for Pugsley to fetch them to Moreton; where Rose would remain, while her father went on to London. But now he looked closely at this dear child—whose life was all the world to him—and he doubted, whether she could bear the jolting of what Master Pugsley described as, "our oncommon aisy vaheykkel."

"Here he is! Here he is, I do declare! What can have brought him without his breakfast?" cried Rose, who was always excited about Pugsley; "and the stream is still very strong for him to cross; and he really has got two—two gentlemen with him. One is that kind old Mr. Tucker. But I have no idea who the other is."

The other soon proved who he was; for strong indignation is not silent, except in a highly superior mind. Mr. Greatorex, a young insurgent attorney of the future, the foremost desk, and the cleverest quill, in the clerks' room of Latimer & Emblin, had been sent from pillar to post, for a fortnight, to find out such a hole as this!

Pugsley's red face was expanded, with a glow of gentle joy. The common lay mind

hates the lawyer; as the lay body objects to the doctor, and the soul is timorous of the parson. So that both Pugsley, and Master Tucker, had listened, throughout the long drive from Moreton, to the plaints, and menaces of this warm youth, with furtive shrugs, and some interchange of winks. The clerk, and the carrier now came up, with decorous salutes to a genuine earl; but the timber-merchant gave his hand, as usual; and Captain Larks bowed, as he pressed it warmly.

"I ought to have been here before now," Mr. Tucker explained, with dignity; "not for the change in your fortunes, my lord; but because of my duty, to a man who trusts me. But the fault is not mine, sir; as you will see. Our folk never came home, till Saturday night, with all their heads turned. Never to London shall they go again, so long as I be living. You would think there was nothing to Exeter, good enough to put their shoes on; yet all the time they was in London, they was crying up Exeter. And Snacks, who married my sister, has behaved the worst of all. Whether it was that he knew too much, or too little, or compounded with the lawyers——"

"Not so," said Mr. Greatorex, coming for-

ward; "our firm is above all that. But it was felt, my lord, that in a position like this, you should be well advised; and that our firm should approach you first, with an accurate statement of the case. I was despatched, with promptitude; but, through wrong information purposely supplied, I have been wandering for several days, over this beautiful, but frightfully rough, county. Perhaps none but myself would have found your lordship now. I have no skin left, in several places—but that will form the basis of a future action. May I have the honour of speaking with your lordship, quite in private?"

"As soon as you please. But Mr. Tucker shall hear all. Mr. Tucker is the truest friend I have. And I wish him to hear everything."

General Punk, who had been cured in three doses, by Spotty Perperaps, was now gone back to Westcombe, and preparing there for a great campaign. The captain showed them into the room, which had been his; while Pugsley told wonderful tales in the kitchen.

"I am in the best possible hands," said the captain, as soon as he had learned all particulars of moment; "and I see no occasion for extreme haste now. Perhaps you, Mr. Greatorex, will

return at once to your excellent principals, with a note from me. I will follow, as soon as things permit. You have heard of the terrible disaster here. I must go down. Will you come with me?"

Mr. Tucker had hired a carriage at Exeter, on the Sunday morning, hoping to be at Christowell that day; but at Moreton, the moor rose frightfully before them, swathed in black, and laced with fire. The driver turned in at the *White Hart*, and stopped, and would not come out again; and there they found the lawyer, also weather-bound, and fuming. Some one told them that Pugsley was ordered to start, right early in the morning, to fetch a gentleman; who proved to be the very one they both were seeking.

Now while these three were gazing, with amazement, at the sad wreck of the tower, and the crocketed pinnacles stuck into the earth (like the sceptre of Canute, in pictures), Mr. Short, who had been up to the leads almost—while every one trembled at his hardihood—and had sounded the bells, of which not one was hurt, and had pushed a great stone down, calling "ware, below," and had waved his hat out at the tremendous thunder hole, so that

people fell flat in the churchyard—he, with his week-day hat full of something, came out, as rank-minded, as if there were no Satan. "Just look at this," said he; "it is extraordinary stuff. Opposite the hole where the flash came in, there is a great dab of it on the wall, as large as——" his expression must not be repeated; but the object he referred to may be found in pasture land. "I shall keep some, as a curiosity; although it certainly does not smell nice."

"It stinks alive!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker; "pitch, and brimstone, and dead men's flesh! I have heard of it before, but never seen it. Cast it from you, reverend sir."

"No, gentlemen. I am getting used to horrors, after nothing else, for nearly twenty-four hours. This deposit should be in the British Museum. But come in, and see, what is greatly on my mind."

The vicar of Christowell, heretofore so keen, judicious, and sensible, was driven from his usual frame of mind, by long excitement, and want of sleep. "There," he said, drawing the red curtain back; "we cannot identify this poor man. And how can we bury him, without it? The strong face shows a man of mark; yet none of the thousand gazers know him."

"I know him by name," cried Mr. Tucker, shuddering, for he was gentle-hearted; "I am sure, it is one George Gaston."

"And I know him, more than by name;" said young Greatorex. "What villainy was he come for here? Lord Delapole, it is your deadly enemy. The man who has laboured, to rob, and ruin you."

"I never harmed him; and I am truly glad of it. I have long felt that some one was against me; but I never even knew his name, except through Mr. Tucker. Let us say nothing against him, now."

He spoke, very softly, as a man impressed with the littleness of human things; and the others, in such a presence, felt that he was right, and screened the dead.

In the afternoon, when Greatorex was gone off, in all haste, to London, and Mr. Short, with his mind relieved, though sad and heavy for his people, was resting at last in his own room, but Christowell churchyard still was thronged with timid, and wondering people; among tossed monuments, and headlong tombstones, cast about like skittle-pins, two persons met, and looked, with some surprise, at one another.

"Like a bombardment, ain't it, sir?" said the

younger of the two, though well of age, as he made a soldier's salute; "reminds me of how it was at Badajos."

"Ah, you were there? I know your face; but at present, I forget your name, my friend; if indeed I ever knew it."

"Rees Howell, sir, of the —— Hussars, 'the never-mind-what,' they used to call us. Most of us knew Colonel Westcombe."

"Because I knew most of your officers," answered the colonel, with his usual modesty; "but where are you living now, Rees Howell?"

"At the *Raven*, with my father, sir. I only came home yesterday. Just in front of this great storm. I never saw worse, in any of the Serries, as they call them. 'Tis as bad as a general action, a'most. The barns are full of groaners, as we used to call the wounded chaps. I've a great mind to tuck up my sleeves, and help. I have seen a good bit of scorching."

"Rees Howell, I am going to do the same, with permission of the doctors. I hope you have no friend, or relative hurt."

"No, sir. The only one that I know is a dead man and he might have made one of me yesterday; for he drew a pistol on me, by Cran-

mere; and I made sure he would have shot me. Ah! he was a bad one, by his face. I speak the same of a chap, live, or dead. You can't hurt him, when he's gone to the devil. And if ever I see a man fit for roasting—and I've been about the world, a good bit too. But who do you think I saw here, not half an hour agone, sir, and made me stare so, when I met you? It never rains, but it pours, sure enough, about Dartmoor; though I knew from my father, that you were there, colonel. Why the poor young captain, young enough he was then, who told such a pile of lies, to save his brother, and was ready to be shot for it, without a button moving. There was only myself, and one other man, besides their two selves, that knew all about it."

"Howell, you surprise me;" answered Colonel Westcombe; leading him to a retired tombstone; "I have always understood — is it possible, that any man can have sacrificed himself so?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose, they made it square between them, for the younger one to take the shame, with a heap of cash to ease it. The elder one gave £50, for me, and Bill Hosier, to divide, the only two that could swear to the truth, upon

oath, to hold our tongues about it. And not being asked, why should we speak, sir, when they had settled it between them?"

"That was your view of it, and natural enough. But how could you two alone know the truth, and be out of all doubt concerning it?"

"Simply enough, sir; as you will say. The night was like pitch, you may remember; and after ten hours in saddle, our eyelids was the brightest part of them. The shame of it turned upon the question, which of them two crossed the river; for the one that had crossed could have nothing to do with the runaway—make, or mention it. And it may sound queer, but true it is, the night being such, and the wood so black, and the boat-bridge so dangerous in the dark, not one of us might have been sure, next morning, which of the brothers came with us, without a little casual accident. Leastways, the two were so much alike, in size, and voice, and standing, that I could not have sworn which was which, in the dark, against their own word about it. Although I should have known, in my own mind, which it was, from his manner of giving orders. But there happened to be, on the further bank, a pit of white

stuff, as white as pipe-clay; and into that our captain popped, up to the tops of his big saddle-boots, and Bill Hosier, and me, gave a hand to pull him out. The bridge was unsafe in the dark for horses, so we crossed on foot, to keep a look-out there.

"Colonel, I ran away, as fast as anybody, when the great alarm arose; back over the bridge, in a twinkling, every one of us, and up on the first horse we could lay hold of, and skittered on the heels of the rest of them. The captain drew his sword, and stood before us; but the rush of men went over him, and he had the place all to himself, and welcome. In the morning, we slunk back, all straggling anyhow, and ashamed to look at one another; and he must have slipped from a by-road, in among us, to share the disgrace of the lot of us. And he did more than that, he took it all upon himself, when the general rode up to inquire; and you know the rest, as well as I do. But Hosier, and I, saw the white stuff on his boots, and could swear where that had come from, and who was the only man that kept his post, and tried to deliver us from being laughed at; and his name was 'Captain Arthur Pole.'"

"And you were content to stand by, and see him shot, for the sake of £50, you scoundrels!"

"No, Colonel Westcombe, that is not fair. The money was not spoken of, till after that, when his life was out of danger. But you know what the service was, and what men are. Neither Hosier, nor I, had a chance to open mouth. We were all under guard, and could not get at one another; and we did not hear a word of what was going on. Bill thought, the same as I did, until we got together, that the saddle would surely be put on the right horse. And when we were brought out, to see the execution, 'Silence' was the order, and not one of us dare move; though our flesh upon our bones was creeping. If one of us had broken rank, a bullet would be through him. For the general, to add to our disgrace, had drawn the rest of the Light Division round us. Ah, colonel, I never shall forget that day. But we made up, for all of it, afterwards."

"Ay, that you did. You were desperate fellows. I never shall forget the next time you were in action. Howell, I am delighted to have heard your tale. It has solved a great mystery, that has lasted many years. I suppose

you are ready to make oath to it, before any magistrate, if called upon."

"At any moment, colonel. And Bill Hosier is living. I came across him, not so very long ago. He keeps the *Nag's Head* at Ipswich."

"Very well. Say no more about it; unless you are called upon to do so. But don't leave this neighbourhood, without my knowledge."

CHAPTER XX.

RESIGNATION.

BEFORE any one, at Touchwood Park, could hear of the great calamity, a letter from Mr. Short arrived, with assurance of Dicky's safety. But the young squire, thinking that they well deserved a fright, had added these words, without the parson's knowledge. "It is true that I am spared; but in divine retribution on my father's impious scheme, I bear upon my brow, for ever, the vivid impression of a high-dried ham. We are all marked with something; and I am marked with this, from its constant presence in my mind. However, it makes no difference."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Miss Touchwood; "Dicky always has been a dreadful story-teller. And if he has got it, we can rub it out with pumice-stone, and squeeze a little *aqua fortis* in. Don't be so foolish, mother

dear. He would have written three pages, if it were true. And even if it is, why should we weep? He will be useful in the world, at last, by giving people an appetite. And it proves how right my father was, in choosing his vocation. He can show a sample of his goods; and they dare not run a skewer through it."

"Julia, you have no feeling. That has always been your fault. Oblige me, by ordering the carriage, at once. Mr. Short begs me earnestly, not to go over, because of the awful sights, and scenes. But what scene can be imagined, half so awful, as the Grecian countenance of my only son, with a high-dried ham upon its brow? I shall go, and tell your father my opinion of him. Don't talk to me about men, after that." In spite of all his strength of mind, Sir Joseph got the worst of it, and was glad to hear wheels at the door, once again.

In such a condition of things, Miss Touchwood had no idea of being left behind. With a quickness of kindness, which did her credit, she put on a pretty half-mourning dress, with a gentle imaginative want of pattern, and a mildness of lustre, like tears that are sup-

pressed. It became her wonderfully well; and she was not entirely ignorant of that fact.

Not far from the turn-pike, they overtook a very nice old gentleman, a squire in a poor way now, but rich with long descent of education (even as *Nous* among dogs was); and he never was arrogant to the Touchwoods, although he was so much poorer. Now Julia had a weakness for nice old gentlemen, as handsome and clever girls often have; and so she invited Squire Wrey into the carriage, little dreaming of the consequence to her own life. For Mr. Wrey, who had been present in the church, and about among the people afterwards, could speak of nothing else, but the grandeur, and sublimity, of Mr. Short's behaviour. Like a strenuous churchman, and stiff-hearted Tory, he almost considered this great blow a blessing, from the glory accruing to the Established Church.

"'Heroic,' is scarcely the word for it, madam," he said, (being rather hard of hearing) in reply to Lady Touchwood's agonised inquiry, whether her son had a ham on his forehead; "you pronounce it heroic; and you well may do so. But it was something much higher than that. There was a grandeur of self-possession, a

dignity, a trust in Providence, combined with a majestic self-reliance, and a nobility of presence—although I am sure he must have longed to be somewhere else—which inspired us all, like the voice of a Nelson; but with a more tranquil, and lofty courage. With a beam, computed at three quarters of a ton, crashing, as you may say, between him, and the clerk (who made off with all celerity), this reverend, and most resolute, gentleman stuck to his text, till he couldn't hear his own voice. And after that, when there were seven people killed, and sixty-two wounded, and the church all in rags, did he say, 'let us run away'? No, madam, he said, 'let us pray.' And his prayer saved fifty lives at least; for if the survivors had all rushed out, one shudders to think of what must have happened. I never heard a grander prayer, in all my life; though I like them out of the prayer-book, best."

"But how could he see above the beam?" asked Julia; "he is so—— I mean he is not very tall."

"In the moment of trial, he seemed to tower. His moral elevation raised him, so that he looked gigantic in the smoke. Depend upon it, my dear young lady, no warrior in the

battle-field has ever performed any feat of valour, half so noble, half so heroic—for after all, that is the word for it."

"But has my son got a ham on his forehead?" Lady Touchwood almost shouted; so difficult was it to get a word in.

"It is not at all unlikely," the squire answered calmly; "most people have got some mark, or other. One highly respectable young woman has a grid-iron with seven bars; so that they might—— But I must not make light of your anxiety, Lady Touchwood. Even if he has, how thankful you must feel!"

"Indeed then, I shall not. I shall never get over it. How much longer in going up this hill? Julia, call out to him, to whip them well."

"Your son has behaved with most admirable kindness," the old gentleman resumed, to make amends; "I hear golden words everywhere of him, Lady Touchwood. He has spent every farthing of his money; and what is more, he has worked like a horse with his own hands."

"He always does spend every farthing of his money," replied his sarcastic sister; "but it is quite a new thing, for him to work with his own hands, like a horse. But here we are!

Dicky, take your hat off, and show us the ham, upon your classic brow."

"Oh, that was only to bring you over, and to get the governor into a row," Squire Dicky replied, without a blush, and in like style eluding the maternal hug. "No, no; not a hair have I turned yet; though I hear that Betty Cork lost a good five pounds' worth, not long come from Exeter. Come and see Short; he is a splendid fellow. You ought to have corking pins stuck into your backs, and the salting stool to sit against; instead of white silk and eider-down. Then you might understand some little of my doings. I am an altered man, from this day forth."

"Well, I don't care; so long as your face is the same." His dear mother wetted a lace handkerchief, from natural sources, and polished the marble of his Grecian forehead.

"An altered man! An altered boy;" exclaimed the jealous Julia. "But any change must be for the better. There is no change yet, in fibs, and brag. What have you done? Mr. Short has done it all."

"No, indeed he has not;" cried the parson, coming out from the sick house Dick was entering; "Lady Touchwood, your son is a won-

derful fellow. I had not the least idea, of the good stuff in him. He has been up all night, he has torn up all his linen, he has put up, like an angel, with any quantity of groans, and—and, really, he has not once asked for so much as a single glass of beer!"

"Then he must be an altered character indeed;" said Julia, looking incredulous.

"You frighten me. Such things are out of all nature. Robert," exclaimed Lady Touchwood, "drive at once to the *Horse-shoes*, or whatever the place is called, and bring half-a-dozen of their best bottled ale. Oh, Mr. Short, can I ever be thankful enough, for this wonderful preservation. But, to carry it so far, is tempting heaven. Don't mind me. I shall get over it, if allowed to sit with Richard."

Mr. Short saw that he was not wanted; for her ladyship now desired to cry. "I would ask you, if you can spare a moment," said the ready Julia, "to show me, at least, the outside of the church."

"Gladly would I show you the inside too," replied Mr. Short, without any second meaning; "but I fear that it would be too great a venture. Stones, and beams, keep tumbling down."

"I should have no fear, with you to guide

me," she answered, in her softest voice, with a glance, that made him tremble more, than the most furious electric flash; "oh, how I do admire lofty courage, and grand chivalry!"

"So do I," said Mr. Short; "but one doesn't know where to find them. I believe that the only brave creature in the church—for I know that I was scared out of all my seven senses—was that beautiful Miss Arthur. For one moment, there came a lane of light between us, from some driftage of the smoke and reek; and there she stood, like a glorious Greek statue; not defiant, not dramatic, but simply with her courage gathered, to live, or to die, as the will of God might be. The sweet nobility of her face was beyond all the powers of sculpture."

"No doubt. That young lady is gifted with graces, which always have the fortune to come out. Others must always disappear, the moment she appears upon the scene. She must have some wonderful transcendant height of courage; by which she defies the lightning, and fries fish. How long have you worshipped that Greek statue, Mr. Short?"

"Upon my word, Miss Touchwood, I had no idea, that you could talk such nonsense, if you tried. I am old enough to be little Rose's

father; and I don't fall in love with the girls I christen. As it is, I have set my heart on a young lady, much too young for me to think of, in my nine and thirtieth year. I am even supposed to be older than that, from the dryness of my sermons, and the absence of anything florid in my theology; as well as because I keep my hair so short—and other things ladies cannot enter into."

"Yes they can. I demand to know them all; because my mother thinks so much of you. I have heard of Mrs. Aggett being sadly roasted; and it makes me so anxious, about—about your dinners. Mr. Wrey says that you have tasted nothing, but brimstone and bitumen, since your Sunday breakfast. I wish I knew anything about cooking—like the Greek statue—but I don't, I don't. Oh, Mr. Short, who is that young lady, so much too young, for you to think of? Will she let me come, and help her? For you are sure to have her."

"I wish I had any such faith in my powers. Will you promise to help me, with all your heart; if I tell you who it is?"

Miss Touchwood nodded blandly, and with an inexpressible slyness in her brilliant eyes, which

even Mr. Short could not interpret. But he said to himself, "now, neck or nothing!"

"The young lady's name is Julia Touchwood. And I have loved her, for several years."

"And you had every right to do it;" said Julia, in her straightforward way; "and the lovely object has long suspected, that you felt an interest in her. But she waited for a proof, of what you were; because she has not much faith in words. And now she has got the proof; and is very proud to get it."

"Then, Julia, do you mean to say——"

"Certainly I do; and you may repent it. But I am too proud ever to repent; even when my mother has boxed my ears. Oh, Mr. Short, you won't do that?"

The place was a lonely one, and Mr. Short (scarcely believing in his good luck) did something else, to feel sure of things. And Julia said, "It is resignation; remember now, it is resignation only; which I have heard you insist upon, as at once a duty, and a blessing."

CHAPTER XXI.

CONJUGATION.

ASHAMED of furious outbreak, and fierce outrage upon tree, and flower, and friendly banks that cradle it, the Christow brook fell back to music, thoughtful pools, and smiling shallows. Among the captain's pears, remained the "witnessed usurpation;" but not a tree was washed away; so prudently had he taken heed of the possible range of water. Neither were his grapes much hurt; for no hail fell, within the focus of the storm; though around its margin, as at Plymouth, and at Hatherleigh, hailstones as large as turkeys' eggs, and some of even 9-oz. weight, are reported to have fallen. Some of his bunches had their rich bloom slurred by the violence of rain, and some were splashed; but the rain had saved most of them from this; and upon the whole, they looked bright and handsome; and he might sell them, if so minded, as

noble earls do nowadays, to turn an honest sixpence.

Reluctant still to take the needful plunge into the world of uproar, strife, deceit, and greed; and knowing that his interests could not suffer, in the hands of the good solicitors; he lingered awhile among his favourites, nearer to his nature, than pomp, or luxury, wealth, or grandeur. For a week of bright October weather, the golden reckoning of fine years, was gleaming gently round all fruitage, with tender touch to ripen it. In the lovely afternoon, of tempered sun, and mellow shade, the captain took his accustomed course, with a tranquil mind, among tranquil things. Then a brisk step, as of an elderly man, going more on his heels than he used to do, fell softly, where the leaves were falling, and the grass was touched with gray.

Colonel Westcombe held out his hand, and bowed—a low bow, such as he never offered, even to the most exalted rank, unless his heart went with it. The captain looked at him, with some surprise, knowing what his nature was; and even with some pain, as if there were ceremony put between them.

"I am heartily ashamed to look at you;"

said the colonel, gazing none the less, with his thick gray eyebrows moving; "what a fool I have been, for trusting facts, instead of trusting character!"

"You have been the kindest of the kind," the captain answered warmly; "when every one else disdained me, you had doubts, whether I deserved it. And I am not sure, that I do not. A man is too prone to acquit himself. But who has told you anything?"

"Everything has been told me, by a man who knows all about it. I resolved to think it over first; lest I should seem to seek you, through your altered position in the world. But a little thought convinced me, that it was mean to imagine, that a man like you would impute such motives to me. So I waited for the month you fixed; and came the first day after it."

"I have been hoping to see you. Come, and sit upon my bench of thought; and tell me all that moves your mind."

"Nothing moves my mind," said Colonel Westcombe, listening thoughtfully to the murmur of the brook, and warbling of the independent robin; "so much as the wrongs, that we men do to one another, carelessly. Upon

our own affairs, we cannot make our minds up, though desiring to have perfect balance; but we settle another man's business for him, and blast his name, without two thoughts. I feel, that I have done this to you; not wantonly, as some people have; but narrowly, very narrowly; and I ask your pardon for it. A young man would not have judged you so. The longer we live in this world, the less we come to know of it."

"Where is Jack?" asked the captain smiling; "according to your theory, my friend, we should call him in, to teach us wisdom."

"And you would not be so far wrong there. That young man is of very keen perception. When old Punk said something, in Jack's hearing, concerning the father of a certain lovely girl, my son forgot the reverence due, to those who were born before him. Jack has been brought up like a Spartan, under the code of—I forget his name, Solon, or Epaminondas—and sooner would he let the fox gnaw out—but I never get straight in a metaphor. What I mean is, that I told him to stop across the water; and no power on earth can bring him over, until he receives the signal. Now I have two points to settle. First, for my own satis-

faction—but you need not tell me, unless you please—why did you ruin your life thus? And then, what do you mean to do, about my Jack?"

"I did what I did," said the captain slowly; "because it was impossible, not to do it. We have supposed ourselves to be, of many generations, without taint. Taint of cowardice, or treachery, I mean; for the taint of any other vice seems light. My father knew that his heir, my brother, was of a violent weak nature; brave enough, so far as that goes, but in no way steadfast. In all, except the heirship, and the money spent upon me, I was always looked upon, as the elder of the two; and this made my brother dislike me. Or perhaps, I have no right to say that, and perhaps the fault was on my side too; but we never were comfortable together. When we got our commissions, I promised my father, to look after Philip, so far as I could (because he was wild and thoughtless) and to keep him from doing disgrace to our name, by any unfashionable vices.

"Philip fought shy of me, as much as possible. He believed that I despised him, because he was so self-indulgent; and perhaps to some extent, I did. But I do not want to puff myself,

at his expense. He had always been indulged, and had known no curb; while I had the benefit of being kept short. He fell into trouble, in London; and my father, who had then much interest, contrived to get him sent out to join us, hoping that discipline, and rough work, might stiffen up his character. Philip submitted, with a very bad grace; and I saw that he would get into some scrape soon, though I little imagined what it would be.

"For I can assure you, Colonel Westcombe, that he was as brave as the best of us; as brave, I mean, in mere bodily courage, and contempt of visible danger. What ailed him, that night, when he lost his mind so, and rushed away headlong, like a tail-piped dog, carrying our men after him, was the terror of an evil conscience. He had done an unmanly thing at home; and he paid for it, with his manhood. He had seduced, under promise of marriage, a beautiful, and innocent young girl, the daughter of one of our chief tenants. Abandoned to disgrace, she drowned herself, after writing him a letter, such as no man should receive. And now, in the depth of that dark night, by the melancholy moaning of the Tagus, her form came slowly up the water to

him, bearing her dead babe on her breast. He leaped on his horse, and shouted madly, calling on his men to save him; the flight was sounded, and away went all, scouring out of the ghastly wood, in a panic never known before. My part was simple. I had to redeem my promise to my father, and to save the heir of our race, and our ancient title, from ignominy. Even my father never knew the truth; for he refused to see me, and I could not write against my brother. I lived abroad for several years, after marrying a maiden, whom I long had loved, and who forsook the world for me. When I lost her, I came back to England, with one only little child, and settled in Devon, for my dear wife's sake.

"Now, whether I have been right, in point of conscience, to maintain a lie, is a question for others to decide; who have not been placed as I have. But I never have regretted it; and on the whole, my life has been a happy one."

"So it ought to be," said Colonel Westcombe, not disdaining to shed tears. "I hope, that I might have done the same. But I fear, that my heart would have broken. And to keep the secret all these years, and to be prepared to die

with it! Pole, you are the noblest man, I have ever known, or heard of."

"My dear friend," said the captain smiling; "there was nothing noble in it. Halloa! there is Jack, on our side of the water! You said, no power would bring him over."

"And I said it, in all good faith. What can have brought him? Why Rose, dear Rose, my own child Rose—as you are going to be, I hope, —what has brought you here, in such a flurry?"

"I am not in a flurry, Colonel Westcombe; I am calm—considering all my treatment. For at least three months, I have had such orders—not to go to this place, and not to go to that—and then your son, Mr. John Westcombe, jumps all across the river, into my carnation bed! It appears to me, as if there was no law left. And instead of protecting me, you are going to betray me."

"My darling," said her father; "it is I who must do that. Jack, come here. You were brave enough, just now. Rose, don't be foolish. What did I catch you doing, under the leather-coat apple tree?"

"You didn't catch me doing anything, papa —only having it done to me."

"Very well; so it shall be now. John Westcombe, take her two hands in yours; if she will give them, as I think she will. Then the colonel will kiss her; and so will I."

"I will kiss my own dear father first," said the maiden, with a prospect of much blushing; "and then Colonel Westcombe—and that will be quite enough."

Now whether she carried out that arrangement, without the lady's postscript to it—where the gist of the communication lies—is a question for Jack, and herself, alone. For the colonel, and the captain, marched away, discussing the days, "when life was life" (because there was so much death, to enliven it), and with great breadth of instance, proving how sad it would be, to be one's own grandson. Happy is the fine fruit ripening thus, with pity for the bloom-bud forming at its base, pleasure in the memory of bygone storms, and sunny content with its own rich honour.

But there was a little tumult yet to come, when General Punk, on a Dartmoor charger, twelve hands and a half in height, set forth at the head of a vast expedition, to capture, or slay, Black Wenlow. That armament still forms a date, in the annals of the moor, and of Oke-

hampton; for verily there it was fitted out, the day before great market-day. Every breast was inspired, with ancestral valour, every stomach, with contemporary thirst and hunger; because the old general stood treat. And if, after that, they caught nobody at all, it was simply because there was nobody to catch. As for Guy Wenlow, and the very extraordinary things that happened to him, his reasons for taking to savage life, his great single-handed encounter with *Nous*, the effect upon his mind of Mr. Gaston's sad end, and the marvellous device and ingenuity, by which he built himself a dry house beneath the peat, and furnished it purely at his neighbours' expense—it would be a Wenlovian, or even a Munrovian act, on our part, to pirate the work, which Mr. Short has in hand, upon that subject.

Neither has Mr. Short yet finished that "Song of the Rose," which he promised to the world; for which delay there are two good reasons—the first, that Dicky Touchwood, upon his return to Cambridge, developed extraordinary poetic power (which raised him above all competition), whether from the way in which he was taken off his feet, or whether from such sense of wrong, as invented the iambus. And a

still better reason was, that Julia, though generally submissive, and enwrapped in children —who were called "the tall Shorts" everywhere—could, by no fallacy of connubial logic, be urged into sufferance of such an outrage.

But perhaps the best reason of all was this—that the subject was above him; as the beauty of the rose is above imagination; because it is nature's beauty.

Yet, the purest, and grandest beauty, (far beyond that of the fairest flower, and high above nature's noblest work) is of the mind, and soul, that labour, to enlarge our humble course; by no defiance, or heroism, or even conscious teaching; but by patience, cheerfulness, and modesty, truth, simplicity, and loving-kindness.

THE END.

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